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Emerging from the Emergency: women in Indira Gandhi's India, 1975-1977

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Abstract

India's State of Emergency (1975-1977) is a critical period in the independent nation's history. The government's suspension of democratic norms and its institution of many, now infamous repressive measures have been the subject of much commentary. However, scholars have not examined Emergency politics from a gendered perspective. Women's participation in support for and resistance to the regime and their experiences of its programmes are notably absent from historiography. This thesis addresses this gap and argues that a gendered perspective enhances our understanding of this critical period in India's political history. It assesses the importance of gendered narratives and women to the regime's dominant political discourses. I also analyse women's experiences of Emergency measures, particularly the regime's coercive sterilisation programme and use of preventive detention to repress dissent. I explore how gendered power relations and women's status affected the implementation of these measures and people's attempts to negotiate and resist them. The thesis also highlights several ways in which women actively supported the Emergency agenda and participated in organised resistance, focusing on the manifestation of these activities in particular spaces. I utilise a diverse collection of sources, innovative methodologies and theoretical perspectives in order to bring these histories, which have hitherto been completely absent from the historiography of these events, to light.

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List of Abbreviations

ABWA	All Bengal Women's Association
ACP	Aurangabad Central Prison
AICC	All India Congress Committee
AIR	All India Radio
APRM	Anti-Price Rise Movement
BCP	Bombay Central Prison
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BLD	Bharatiya Lok Dal
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CSWI	Committee on the Status of Women in India
DAVP	Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
DIR	Defence of India Rules (1971)
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, regional party in Tamil Nadu
INC	Indian National Congress
IWY	International Women's Year
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
JP	Jayaprakash Narayan
LSS	Lok Sangharsh Samiti (People's Struggle Committee)
MCH	Mother and Child Healthcare
MISA	Maintenance of Internal Security Act (1971)
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
NCP	Nagpur Central Prison
NFIW	National Federation of Indian Women

NPP	National Population Policy
POW	Progressive Organisation of Women
PTI	Press Trust of India
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SCI	Shah Commission of Inquiry
SNDT	Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University
UP	Uttar Pradesh
YCP	Yerwada Central Prison

Glossary of Terms

<i>Adivasi</i>	scheduled tribe
<i>ashram</i>	spiritual hermitage or monastery, usually located amidst natural surroundings
<i>Ayah</i>	nursemaid/nanny
<i>balahar</i>	weaning food
<i>batashas</i>	sweets
<i>bazar</i>	market
<i>Bharat darshan</i>	India tour
<i>Bharat Mata</i>	Mother India
Congress Seva Dal	INC grassroots party organisation
<i>coolie</i>	labourer
<i>Dalit</i>	scheduled caste/members of castes considered to be untouchable
detenue	prisoner or a person detained in custody
<i>dharna</i>	non-violent, sit-in protest
<i>garibi hatao</i>	'remove poverty'
<i>ghunghat</i>	veil or headscarf
<i>goonda</i>	hired thug
<i>Harijan</i>	term referring to dalits/members of castes considered to be untouchable
<i>Hindutva</i>	Hindu nationalism
<i>janata</i>	'the people'
<i>jhuggi</i>	slum
<i>-ji</i>	a suffix indicating honour and respect in north Indian languages
<i>kirtan</i>	Hindu devotional songs
<i>lakh</i>	unit in the Indian numbering system equal to 100,000

<i>lokpriye</i>	loved by the people
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	the lower house in the Indian parliament
<i>mangal kalash</i>	vessel used in Hindu rituals or on important occasions as a sign of welcome
<i>Marathi Sahitya Sammelan</i>	Marathi literary festival
<i>Mausi</i>	Aunt (Mother's sister)
<i>mohalla</i>	neighbourhood
<i>Mumkin</i>	'possible', underground journal
<i>nasbandi</i>	sterilisation
<i>nasbandi ka vakt</i>	the sterilisation time
<i>Nav Nirman</i>	student movement in Gujarat, meaning the movement for regeneration
<i>Nehru Jayanti</i>	public holiday celebrating Jawaharlal Nehru's birth date
<i>padayatra</i>	journey by foot, undertaken by politicians to interact with citizens and mobilise supporters
ragging	bullying faced by students, often suggesting physical violence
<i>Rajya Sabha</i>	the upper house in the Indian parliament
recanalisation	surgical procedure to reverse vasectomy
<i>rickshawala</i>	rickshaw driver
<i>sati</i>	widow immolation
<i>satyagraha</i>	'truth force', non-violent resistance
<i>satyagrahi</i>	a person who participates in a <i>satyagraha</i> campaign
<i>Satya Samachar</i>	'true news', an underground newspaper published by the LSS
<i>Satyavani</i>	Friends of India Society International news service
<i>shakti</i>	power/empowerment
<i>Shri</i>	a form of address, akin to Mr

<i>Smt/Shrimati</i>	a form of address for married women, akin to Mrs
<i>Swaraj</i>	bulletin published by the Free JP campaign, UK
<i>-tai</i>	suffix meaning sister, indicating respect, in Marathi
<i>thali</i>	dish/metal tray for serving food
<i>tilaka</i>	A mark worn on the forehead, Hindu custom indicating welcome or honour
tubectomy	surgical procedure for female sterilisation
<i>upvas</i>	fast
vasectomy	surgical procedure for male sterilisation

Map of India



Administrative map of India showing states and union territories¹

¹ Nations Online http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/india_map.html (accessed May 2017). Some of these states were formed after the period 1975-1977. For instance Chhattisgarh, which I refer to in chapter four of this thesis, was formed out of southeastern districts of Madhya Pradesh in November 2000. Jharkhand and Uttarakhand were also formed in the same month.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Dr Anthony Carrigan (1980-2016) for his intellectual vibrancy, his activism, his teaching and his friendship. I doubt whether I would have embarked on this journey without his stimulating tuition, support and encouragement. The world was a better place for his scholarship and his humanity.

Introduction

Existing scholarship on the Indian Emergency (1975-1977) pays little attention to women's experiences, activism and gendered politics. I challenge this marginalisation, using innovative methodological perspectives and an array of unique source materials to address this gap. This twenty-one-month period of authoritarian rule, in which Indira Gandhi's government imprisoned opposition, censored the press, postponed elections and suspended fundamental rights, is one of the most infamous and controversial episodes in the independent nation's history. In her work on this published in 2003, anthropologist Emma Tarlo described the Emergency as 'much mythologised but little studied', claiming that it had 'slipped through the net of academic disciplines'; too recent to interest historians, yet too far in the past for social scientists.¹ Arvind Rajagopal similarly situated it as a 'frequently invoked but little examined period of Indian history',² and recently Patrick Clibbens noted that the regime remains 'frequently alluded to' yet 'poorly understood'.³

There are several reasons for the silences and ambiguities surrounding Emergency histories, including a lack of definitive source material. Further, conflicting memories and competing, sometimes irreconcilable, narratives of this period persist. Sunil Khilnani observes a 'generalised self-induced Alzheimer's among all who played a role in its events', as both its victims and perpetrators continue to occupy prominent positions in Indian politics.⁴ When this amnesia has subsided, popular memories tend to echo current Prime Minister Narendra Modi's description of the regime, as 'one of India's darkest periods...when the then political leadership trampled over our democracy'.⁵ For those who participated in resistance, like Modi and other members of the current BJP government,

¹ Emma Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003) 2.

² Arvind Rajagopal, 'Sangh's Role in the Emergency' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38.27 (2003) 2797.

³ Patrick Clibbens, "'The destiny of this city is to be the spiritual workshop of the nation': clearing cities and making citizens during the Indian Emergency, 1975-1977" *Contemporary South Asia*, 22.1 (2014) 5.

⁴ Sunil Khilnani, 'States of Emergency. Review: *Indira The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*' *The New Republic*, 225.25 (2002) 44.

⁵ Narendra Modi, @narendramodi, Twitter post (24 June 2015) 6.58pm <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/613889061493735424> (accessed 12 April 2017).

their anti-Emergency activities still function as a kind of political capital, and so their narratives reflect a stake in a particular version of the Emergency's history.⁶

Over the last fifteen years, innovative scholarship on this period has emerged drawing on newly released or acquired sources. It no longer eludes the net of academic disciplines and several historians have recently analysed Emergency experiences and interrogated the dominant narratives that hitherto excluded elements of it from view. Mary E. John insists that increasingly, the wide range of approaches taken by scholars and the divergent interpretations put forward to analyse the regime are just as noteworthy as the silences surrounding the topic.⁷ However, gendered perspectives and women's experiences remain markedly absent. Even feminist scholar John only refers to women's studies and women's movements in her description of the Emergency as a catalyst for these, as a potentially 'progressive space' given the emphasis on fundamental rights that followed its collapse in March 1977.⁸ A handful of studies have brought a gendered perspective to bear on Gandhi's Emergency leadership,⁹ however, there has been no attempt to extend such gendered readings beyond the female figurehead. Besides the few women's voices that appear in Tarlo's study, women's experiences of the regime's repressive measures remain largely unconsidered.¹⁰ Likewise, the role of individual or organised groups of women in support for or resistance to Gandhi's Emergency remains completely unaccounted for.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this, particularly the importance of anti-Emergency activism to the legitimisation of the Jana Sangh and BJP, see Rajagopal, *Sangh's Role in the Emergency*. Edward Anderson and Patrick Clibbens also commented on this in their paper "Smugglers of truth": The Emergency, the Indian diaspora, and Transnational Citizenship' *British Association of South Asian Studies Conference* (Cambridge: April 2016).

⁷ Mary E. John, 'The Emergency in India: Some Reflections on the Legibility of the Political' *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 15.4 (2014) 625.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 632-634.

⁹ See Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's chapter, 'Gender, Leadership and Representation: the "Case" of Indira Gandhi' in *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Trina Nileena Banerjee's article 'Political Iconography and the Female Political Leader: The Case of Indira Gandhi, some Initial Questions' *Humanities Underground*, (October 2012) <http://humanitiesunderground.org/political-iconography-the-female-political-leader-the-case-of-indira-gandhi-some-initial-questions/> (accessed March 2015). I discuss these works further in the next chapter.

¹⁰ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*.

This thesis addresses these gaps and breaks new ground in three ways, principally in its location of women and gendered narratives at the centre of Emergency politics. I utilise gender as a 'category of historical analysis', in Joan Wallach Scott's terms, to produce unique insights into how the regime was articulated, legitimised and resisted.¹¹ I argue that gendered identities and power relations shaped its dominant narratives and influenced the implementation of its measures. The thesis also positions women as active agents of Emergency politics. It examines their participation in the underground resistance movement and explores how organised women's groups mobilised in support for Gandhi's government. This is critical given the failure to acknowledge their roles in these activities within historiography, which I address in detail in the next chapter. Secondly, these discussions have significant implications for broader understandings of the regime. This is not a contributory history, which simply highlights that women also participated in and experienced these events. Much of the evidence I present has broader implications, some of which speak to recent interventions in historiography. Finally, this thesis is innovative in the methods, sources, and theoretical insights that it deploys, particularly in its use of perspectives from the related but distinct fields of gender and women's history to understand the regime. I also draw on a synthesis of evidence including government documents, political party publications, underground literature, visual sources, fiction, oral history interviews and personal correspondence collected during extensive fieldwork, often bringing to light new evidence that has not appeared in existing scholarship.

The Emergency

In June 1975, Indira Gandhi's Congress Party government was in crisis.¹² Daughter of India's first leader Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi held the position of Prime Minister from 1966. When Nehru's successor Lal Bahadur Shastri died suddenly, senior Congress leaders

¹¹ Joan Wallach Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis' *The American Historical Review*, 90.5 (1986) 1053-1075.

¹² Throughout, this thesis refers to the Indian National Congress (INC) as the Congress, for simplicity.

appointed Gandhi largely because of her 'indistinctness and ambiguity'; her lack of power base or association with any particular policy or ideology.¹³ The fourth general elections in 1967 saw the Congress's worst electoral performance to date: 'for millions of voters the Congress was now just a political party, rather than the soul of the nationalist movement'.¹⁴ Factional infighting, the limitations of its politics of patronage, rising regionalist sentiments and the increasing unity of opposition reflected transformations in Indian politics and society that the Congress struggled to respond to.¹⁵ Conflicts reached their peak in 1969 when the party split into Congress (R), which followed Gandhi, and Congress (O), with veteran Congressman and freedom fighter Moraji Desai at its head.

Gandhi's organisation retained control of the party's high command and apparatus and became the dominant force. It pursued a more populist politics and in 1971's general election, she won a landslide victory, propelled by her promises to *garibi hatao* (remove poverty) and a campaign increasingly centred on her personal appeal.¹⁶ Her leadership over war with Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh later in the year cemented her popularity, but a catalogue of economic problems and political crises began to challenge this. Gandhi's government could not meet the economic expectations roused by catchy slogans. Instead, crop failures, rising prices, shortages of essential commodities, inflation and increasing unemployment exacerbated the issues it faced. Defence expenditure and the burdens of India's support for the liberation of Bangladesh, which included sheltering millions of refugees, also took its toll on an increasingly bleak economic situation.¹⁷ Although Gandhi's

¹³ Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Indira Gandhi and Indian Politics' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21.38/39 (1986) 1697.

¹⁴ Diego Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch: Indira Gandhi's Final Term in Office* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2015) 11; see also Rajni Kothari, 'The Political Change of 1967' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6.3/4/5 (1971) 231-250.

¹⁵ Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 2007) 419-444.

¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the political and economic contexts in which Gandhi made these promises and the obstacles to them, see Rajni Kothari, 'Political Economy of *Garibi Hatao*' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7.31/32/33 (1972) 1541-1552.

¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the various economic issues facing India during this period see Bipan Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003) 13-19

populist appeal maintained electoral support, the Congress Party itself 'ceased to be an instrument of effective governance'.¹⁸

From 1973 a series of protests swept across various states and their urban centres.¹⁹ In May 1974, Socialist and President of the All India Railwaymen's Federation George Fernandes led a three-week long railway strike over pay scales, restricting the movement of people and goods and paralysing the country.²⁰ Around the same time under the Anti-Price Rise Movement (APRM), women organised by leaders from the Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) and Socialist Party, took to Mumbai's (formerly Bombay) streets in protest marches against rising prices and the unavailability of essential commodities. These protests spread throughout Maharashtra, to neighbouring Gujarat and elsewhere.²¹ In January 1974, students in Gujarat led the *Nav Nirman* movement (the movement for regeneration) against corruption and demanded the dismissal of the state's Congress government. At times violent riots swept through cities and towns and inspired a similar mobilisation against misgovernance by students in Bihar.

As clashes between protesters and police intensified, in March 1974 student groups asked political leader and social activist Jayaprakash Narayan, a 'figure of great moral authority, a hero of the freedom struggle', to step in and lead the movement.²² The 'JP movement', as it became known, demanded 'Total Revolution', broadening the agitations' focus from student problems to economic issues, anti-corruption and the preservation of democracy. It also propelled an increasingly unified opposition to Gandhi's Congress from across the political spectrum and, although based in Bihar, the movement spread particularly across northern states. In response to the movement's protests over her

¹⁸ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, 28. Maiorano discusses the degeneration of the Congress Party more broadly throughout the 1970s (11-32).

¹⁹ Maiorano notes that 'although the social unrest that produced the JP movement certainly had a mass character, it was nevertheless limited to the urban world in a small number of states' (Ibid., 28).

²⁰ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 480-481.

²¹ Nandita Gandhi, 'Masses of Women, but where is the Movement? A Case Study of the Anti-Price Rise Movement in Bombay, 1972-1975' in Saskia Wieringa (ed.) *Subversive Women: Women's Movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997) 213-228.

²² Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 479.

government's imposition of President's Rule in Gujarat, Gandhi ordered state elections for early June 1975. Her Congress lost to the newly formed Janata Front, a coalition of political parties organised by JP and Moraji Desai.²³

In the midst of this intensifying opposition, Gandhi also faced a personal challenge to her position as Prime Minister. Justice Jagmohanlal Sinha convicted Gandhi of electoral misconduct in the Allahabad High Court on 12 June 1975, over elections in her constituency Rae Bareilly in 1971. In a case brought by her rival in that constituency, Socialist Raj Narain, Sinha ruled that Gandhi inappropriately used Uttar Pradesh (UP) government resources and a government employee during her campaigns. Although Sinha's judgment also cleared her of fourteen offences and granted a stay order of twenty days in which to file an appeal, it nullified her election to parliament. The ruling bolstered the JP-led opposition and a plethora of protests calling for Gandhi's dismissal followed, as well as counter-demonstrations by Congress supporters encouraging her to remain.²⁴ It was in this context that during the night of 25 June 1975, the Government of India invoked Article 352 of the constitution and President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed signed the proclamation of Emergency rule.

In a broadcast to the nation over All India Radio (AIR) the following day, Gandhi referred to the opposition, and particularly JP's call for authorities to disobey immoral orders from the government, as part of a 'deep and widespread conspiracy' that threatened to 'disrupt normal functioning' and damage the country's stability and security. She insisted that 'the new Emergency proclamation will in no way affect the rights of law-abiding citizens'.²⁵ On 27 June, Gandhi claimed that 'since the proclamation, there is normalcy all over the country'.²⁶ The regime's repression of dissent in the name of law and order began

²³ Ibid., 489.

²⁴ 'Mrs Gandhi must go, says non-CPI opposition' *Indian Express* (13 June 1975) 5; 'Mrs Gandhi to appeal: No resignation, strong party backing to continue as leader' *Indian Express* (13 June 1975) 1.

²⁵ Indira Gandhi, *Selected Speeches and Writings of Indira Gandhi, 1972-1977* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1984) 177-78.

²⁶ Ibid., 178.

immediately, as authorities arrested opposition party leaders, including JP, overnight on 25 June.²⁷ Throughout the Emergency authorities continued to detain members of political parties and dissenters from across the political spectrum, including the CPI (M), Socialist Party, Congress (O), Jana Sangh and Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD). The CPI was the only mainstream opposition party to support the imposition of Emergency, although it retracted this support towards the end of the regime.²⁸ The government banned organisations, prohibited public meetings and imposed strict press censorship. Gandhi also suspended elections and made several constitutional changes. The 38th and 39th Constitutional Amendments, introduced in July and August 1975, placed the Emergency and the office of Prime Minister above juridical scrutiny.²⁹ In November, the Supreme Court upheld Gandhi's election and overturned the Allahabad ruling.³⁰

As well as consolidating political power, Gandhi's government launched socio-economic programmes, which it used to justify the continuing need for the State of Emergency and its restrictions. On 1 July 1975 over AIR, Gandhi announced a twenty-point economic programme and called for 'hard work, sustained by clear vision, iron will and the strictest discipline' to implement it.³¹ 'The Emergency', she insisted, 'provides us a new opportunity to go ahead with our economic tasks.'³² Alongside these measures, none of which were particularly new, the government also intensified its family planning and urban clearance drives. These remain the most infamous Emergency programmes, under which millions of people were coercively sterilised and people's homes, especially slums, were aggressively demolished.

²⁷ 'State of Emergency Declared: Several leaders arrested' *Times of India* (27 June 1975) 1.

²⁸ For further discussion of the CPI's stance see David Lockwood's recent study, *The Communist Party of India and the Indian Emergency* (New Delhi: Sage, 2016).

²⁹ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 499.

³⁰ 'Mrs Gandhi's Election Upheld: Unanimous judgment by Supreme Court' *Indian Express* (8 November 1975) 1.

³¹ Gandhi, *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 357.

³² *Ibid.* For a further discussion of the Emergency's socio-economic measures, see Vernon Hewitt, *Political Mobilisation and Democracy in India: States of Emergency* (London: Routledge, 2008) 128-132.

On 18 January 1977, Gandhi shocked the nation and announced that the government would hold elections in March.³³ She said that this decision stemmed from its 'unshakeable faith in the power of the people'.³⁴ There has been much speculation about the reasons behind the sudden restoration of this faith, although these are still unclear given that Gandhi's personal papers remain closed. Most assert that Gandhi was ill informed and distanced from popular opinion, and as a result not fully aware of the growing resentment towards the Emergency. As government released detainees and relaxed censorship to facilitate this election, this resentment and now familiar stories of what have been termed Emergency 'excesses', like forced sterilisations, torture in prisons and harassment of opposition, began to surface. Parties that were active in the pre-Emergency agitations and participated in underground resistance, the Jana Sangh, BLD, Congress (O) and Socialist Party, contested the election jointly under the umbrella Janata (People's) Party, with JP's support. Commentators have often described this election as a referendum on Emergency rule. Gandhi's Congress won just 153/540 seats in the *Lok Sabha* (lower house of parliament) and the Janata Party formed a new government, with Moraji Desai as Prime Minister.

Historiography

This very brief summary of the events that precipitated the declaration of Emergency and followed it is a well-known, often written history. In the regime's immediate aftermath and even during it, journalists, scholars and commentators scrambled to make sense of why and how Gandhi's government imposed it and what it meant for India's democracy.³⁵ This was no easy task given the Emergency's restrictions on information. The author of one

³³ 'Lok Sabha Elections in March – PM: Emergency relaxed for legitimate activity by recognised parties' *The Hindu* (19 January 1977) 1.

³⁴ Gandhi, *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 303.

³⁵ See, for example, W.H Morris-Jones, 'Whose Emergency – India's or Indira's?' *The World Today*, 31.11 (November 1975) 451-461; Henry C. Hart (ed.) *Indira Gandhi's India: A Political System Reappraised* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1976); Norman D. Palmer, 'India in 1976: The Politics of Depoliticization' *Asian Survey*, 17.2 (February 1977) 160-180; Romesh Thapar, 'The Real Meat of the Emergency' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12.15 (April 1977) 587.

article published in 1976 simply admitted that ‘the full impact of the government’s activities under the Emergency cannot be accurately gauged at this point’.³⁶ The struggle to understand the situation was not simply resolved when the government lifted formal censorship. The Congress continued, and often continues, to espouse what Tarlo terms ‘official’ narratives of the Emergency.³⁷ It has insisted on the regime’s positive outcomes and on Gandhi’s benevolence, and attributed its unsavoury elements to an overzealous bureaucracy or to Gandhi’s son, Sanjay. He became an increasingly prominent, although unelected, figure during this period as a Youth Congress leader, and his five-point programme included family planning and slum clearance; the most controversial Emergency measures.³⁸ His biographer Vinod Mehta notes that placing all of the blame on Sanjay, who died in a plane crash in 1980, became ‘part of the party’s official history’, and an established tactic used to distance itself from Emergency legacies and controversies.³⁹ After elections in March 1977, a vast body of literature emerged from various sections ‘as if to compensate for the burden of censorship’, constructing ‘the post-Emergency counter narrative’.⁴⁰ Prison diaries, memoirs, media reports, underground literature, public hearings and government documents revealed a very different version of this history. Yet, this proliferation of materials did not always help to see the period and its events more clearly. As journalists John Dayal and Ajoy Bose asserted, ‘the trouble with the post-election situation in India is that the tiny bushes in the foreground have hidden the forest behind it’.⁴¹

Given the influence of the Subaltern Studies collective on the history of modern India and its emphasis on histories from below, Sunil Khilnani notes that ‘we can now see how those situated at different locations in Indian society have produced their own distinctive

³⁶ Harold L. Erdman, ‘The Industrialists’ in Hart (ed.) *Indira Gandhi’s India*, 138.

³⁷ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 24-30.

³⁸ Rebecca Jane Williams discusses the Congress’s representations of the Emergency in a publication marking its 125th anniversary, in which it placed the blame for the ‘over enthusiasm’ of Emergency squarely on Sanjay Gandhi. See ‘Storming the Citadels of Poverty: Family Planning under the Emergency in India, 1975-1977’ *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 73.2 (2014) 475.

³⁹ Vinod Mehta, *The Sanjay Story* (1978) (London: Harper Collins, 2012), xiv.

⁴⁰ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 31.

⁴¹ John Dayal and Ajoy Bose, *For Reasons of State: Delhi under Emergency* (1977) (New Delhi: Orient, 1992) 1.

conceptions of the nation'. However, he argues that this broadening has sometimes meant that 'political history has been neglected – the doings of the state, of its elites, and of the many significant individuals in India's twentieth century history'.⁴² This is not the case in relation to the Emergency. Conversely, a concern with high politics, key individuals and state machinery dominated scholarship on the regime for some time. Attempts to explain Gandhi's imposition of Emergency rule and her decision to revoke it shaped much scholarly work on these events. Several commentators and biographers explain the regime exclusively in terms of her personality⁴³ or the history of her leadership.⁴⁴ Such personalised accounts are warranted to a certain extent, given the increasingly centralised and personalised politics that characterised the Emergency, which I discuss in detail in chapter two.

Other studies tend to address the regime in terms of its meanings for the Indian state and its democracy.⁴⁵ This has produced varied interpretations of the reasons behind the Emergency and its legacies. Atul Kohli claims that the populist and personality politics that culminated in its imposition 'definitely weakened some of India's democratic institutions', although he insists that the regime was but a 'brief authoritarian interlude' and that elections in March 1977 'confirmed the efficacy of Indian democracy'.⁴⁶ Khilnani argues that while Gandhi weakened constitutional regularities, the Emergency actually opened the state to popular politics and reinforced democratic processes, since 'democracy, in the form of electoral participation, had become indelible: no one was willing to give it up'.⁴⁷ Although

⁴² Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (1977) (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003) 2.

⁴³ Balraj Puri, for instance, claimed it was 'Indira Gandhi's insecure personality that made her seek security in an authoritarian set up', in 'A Fuller View of the Emergency' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30.28 (1995) 1736. There is an abundance of biographical writing on Gandhi, which fuels such psychoanalytical interpretations.

⁴⁴ Kaviraj, 'Indira Gandhi and Indian Politics.'

⁴⁵ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne H. Rudolph, 'To the Brink and Back: Representation and the State in India' *Asian Survey*, 18.4 (1978) 379-400; Aaron S. Klieman, 'Indira's India: Democracy and Crisis Government' *Political Science Quarterly*, 96.2 (1981) 241-589; Arend Lijphart, 'The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation' *American Political Science Review*, 90.2 (1996) 258-269; Stuart Cobridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ Atul Kohli (ed.) *The Success of India's Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 8.

⁴⁷ Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 54.

not all agree with Ranajit Guha's claim that 'nothing has been well with Indian democracy ever since its inception', scholars have now widely heeded his warning against viewing the Emergency as an isolated aberration, and instead position it in the context of long term trends and issues.⁴⁸

Marxist perspectives on the regime have long emphasised this continuity. Andre Gunder Frank claims that the Emergency's origins lie in the accumulation crisis of Indian industry that had been deepening since the mid-1960s and Achin Vanaik positions Gandhi's declaration as an attempt to re-establish firm, bourgeois leadership.⁴⁹ A.K. Roy similarly views the regime 'as an exercise to keep the ruling class in good health', foregrounding this continuity in his assertion that even after elections in 1977, 'the ruling class was not hurt; no policy was changed; only the name was changed'.⁵⁰ Political analysts have also exposed the falsity of juxtapositions between the nation's earlier years and the turbulence of 1975, demonstrating that 'the settled coherence of the Nehru era is in fact a retrospective mirage'.⁵¹ Historian Bipan Chandra underscores the importance of placing both the Emergency and the JP movement in their larger historical and global contexts.⁵² Vernon Hewitt similarly argues that situating the regime within these wider processes not only yields a better understanding of 1975-1977, but also helps explain the profound political shifts that followed, such as the rise of non-Congress governments and Hindu nationalism.⁵³ Hewitt and others also place this period in the context of other declarations of emergency rule in India and elsewhere.⁵⁴ Anil Kalhan, for instance, argues that the way in which 'anti-

⁴⁸ Ranajit Guha, 'Indian Democracy: Long Dead, Now Buried' *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 6.1 (1976) 40.

⁴⁹ Andre Gunder Frank, 'Emergence of Permanent Emergency in India' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12.11 (1977) 463-465 & 467-475; Achin Vanaik, *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India* (London: Verso, 1990).

⁵⁰ A.K. Roy, 'Pokhran Tests and Memories of the Emergency' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33.26 (1998) 1611.

⁵¹ Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 30.

⁵² Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy*, 3.

⁵³ Hewitt, *Political Mobilisation and Democracy in India*, 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Jyotirindra Das Gupta, 'A Season of Caesars: Emergency Regimes and Development Politics in Asia' *Asian Survey*, 18.4 (1978) 315-349; Imtiaz Omar, *Emergency Powers and the Courts in India and Pakistan* (The Hague, London and New York: Kluwer Law International, 2002); Victor V. Ramraj and Arun K. Thiruvengadam (eds.) *Emergency Powers in Asia: Exploring the Limits of Legality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

democratic tendencies have continued to manifest themselves in the laws and institutions of India and Pakistan' owes 'in part to the colonial legacy's persistence'.⁵⁵ Comparative studies emphasising this continuity and observations about the place of 'emergency like situations' in 'so-called "normal" times',⁵⁶ situate the specific events of 1975-1977 within broader historical and theoretical notions of the state of exception. As Giorgio Agamben notoriously asserts, this 'tends to increasingly appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics'.⁵⁷

Over the last fifteen years, significant interventions in this scholarship have emerged characterised primarily by a shift away from political histories of the state, elites and significant individuals. Anthropologist Emma Tarlo's study has been instrumental in facilitating this. Combining an analysis of Delhi Development Authority (DDA) archives with ethnographic work and conversations with one Delhi colony's residents, she traces how Emergency policies were implemented, negotiated and subverted at the local level. Examining the intrusions of the state into people's daily lives, she positions the regime as 'a trope through which to explore the emergencies of everyday life for the poor and marginalised sections of the Delhi population'.⁵⁸ The two aspects of the regime that Tarlo attends to – slum clearance and sterilisation – are the focus of some of the most innovative recent work on this period. Patrick Clibbens's article on urban clearance makes a case for positioning this as a national programme that extended beyond Delhi. Areas of his work echo Tarlo's focus on people, highlighting that 'the published data on which historians have relied provides figures for the number of buildings demolished but not the number of people affected'.⁵⁹ He analyses areas of the programme that scholars have neglected, such as the detention of street vendors and removal of beggars, arguing that it was often 'the bodies of

⁵⁵ Anil Kalhan, 'Constitution and Extra-Constitution: Colonial Regimes in Postcolonial Pakistan and India' in Ramraj and Thiruvengadam (eds.) *Emergency Powers in Asia*, 92.

⁵⁶ John, 'The Emergency in India', 635.

⁵⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) 2.

⁵⁸ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 5.

⁵⁹ Clibbens, 'The destiny of this city', 52.

the urban poor – not their buildings – that were the explicit target’ of Emergency measures.⁶⁰ Rebecca Jane Williams makes a similar argument about the regime’s family planning measures. Placing the Emergency programme in the wider contexts of Indian and international family planning drives, discourses of development and Gandhi’s government’s promises to remove poverty, she claims that these measures ‘meant not an attack on the roots of poverty, but an assault on the bodies of the poor’.⁶¹

All of these assessments underscore the continuities between these and earlier policies on urban clearance and family planning, viewing the Emergency as an intensification of existing measures rather than an entirely new phenomenon. The release of new source materials facilitated much of this work. Previously, scholarship relied heavily on the three published reports of the Shah Commission of Inquiry, which the Janata administration established to investigate the regime. Clibbens’s and Williams’s recent works utilise the Commission’s archived files held at the National Archives of India, which were recently opened to researchers. As well as an emphasis on people’s experiences, examinations of newly released, discovered or attended to source materials have facilitated recent explorations of resistance to the State of Emergency.

Historian Bipan Chandra inaugurated this trend in his insistence that in order to understand them, we must analyse Gandhi’s regime and the JP-led movement in tandem with one another.⁶² Ramachandra Guha’s comprehensive assessment of the Emergency in his history of India since independence includes discussions of attempts to resist it within the media, political opposition and the organised underground resistance movement that ensued.⁶³ These interventions are critical, as despite the proliferation of ‘counter narrative’ publications in the regime’s immediate aftermath, its various restrictions on dissent have given rise to the view that, as Vernon Hewitt insists, ‘there were no notable protests over

⁶⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁶¹ Williams, ‘Storming the Citadels of Poverty’, 471.

⁶² Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy*.

⁶³ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 501-507.

the measures taken by the government'.⁶⁴ Guha's work and the collections of underground literature that he utilises show that whilst many commentators fail to note protests, they certainly did exist. Supurna Das Gupta's detailed discussion of dissenting literature and Kristin Plys's forthcoming work on the Indian Coffee House during this period also shed light on the presence and nature of anti-Emergency sentiments.⁶⁵

Das Gupta's exploration of dissenting literature also assesses the 'forms of censorship and self-censorship adopted by these chroniclers of Emergency'.⁶⁶ Recent scholarship interrogates dominant Emergency narratives and their connections to the regime's strategies of power and surveillance. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, for instance, charts the emergence of an 'aesthetics of state control' through a discussion of the harsh censorship restrictions placed on the film industry and the ways it was coerced into producing government propaganda.⁶⁷ Maya Dodd's doctoral thesis on 'technologies of witness' in Indian democracy since 1975 examines how the nation has been narrated, analysing the connections between narratives of democracy and the political order. Dodd takes the Emergency as a starting point when this was interrupted, transforming modes of modernist narration into new, postcolonial forms centred on freedom, government and community.⁶⁸ Trina Nileena Banerjee's article, one of the only attempts to assess the gendered nature of the regime's leadership, foregrounds the gendered, religious iconographies that underpinned the narration of the nation during the Emergency.⁶⁹ These recent interventions in historiography demonstrate a concerted effort to interrogate

⁶⁴ Hewitt, *Political Mobilisation and Democracy in India*, 124.

⁶⁵ Supurna Das Gupta, 'The Nation and its Discontents: Depicting Dissent during the Emergency' *Sanglap*, 2.2 (Feb 2016) <http://sanglap-journal.in/index.php/sanglap/article/view/119/147> (accessed March 2016); Kristin Plys, 'Political Deliberation and Democratic Reversal in India: Indian Coffee House during the Emergency (1975-1977) and the Third World "Totalitarian Movement"' *Theory and Society*, 46.2 (2017) 117-142; Kristin Plys, 'Political Deliberation and Democratic Reversal in India: Indian Coffee House during the Emergency (1975-1977) and the Third World "Totalitarian Movement"' *SOAS Third Annual Graduate Workshop: Radical South Asia* (London: May 2016).

⁶⁶ Das Gupta, 'The Nation and its Discontents.'

⁶⁷ Ashish Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009) 232.

⁶⁸ Maya Dodd, 'Archives of Democracy: Technologies of Witness in Literatures on Indian Democracy since 1975', PhD Thesis (Stanford University: September 2006) 15.

⁶⁹ Banerjee, 'Political Iconography.'

established narratives of the regime and bring to light a diverse range of Emergency histories.

Outline of chapters

Chapter one sets out the thesis's methodology, explaining the theoretical insights that shaped the research and discussing in more detail why gendered perspectives are absent from the historiography sketched out above. It also details the multiplicity of sources consulted in order to locate gendered narratives and women's experiences. The thesis has three broad areas of focus: narratives, bodies and spaces. It examines the presence of gendered identities and women in the narratives of Emergency politics; assesses the impact of its policies on women's bodies through a detailed discussion of its sterilisation programme; and investigates women's engagements with the regime in particular spaces. These three areas of focus also structure the methodology chapter.

Chapters two and three are concerned with narratives. In chapter two, I draw on government publications, political party pamphlets, speeches, cartoons and underground literature to demonstrate how gendered identities and images, like *Bharat Mata* (Mother India), shaped the dominant discourses of Gandhi's Emergency government and the organised opposition. Chapter three extends this discussion, arguing that women were also crucial to pro-Emergency propaganda. It explores how the Congress and CPI utilised their respective women's groups to depict widespread, popular support for the regime. Chapter four examines its sterilisation programme, drawing primarily on the Shah Commission of Inquiry's archived files. Contrary to dominant perceptions that this was a vasectomy programme, I explore ways that these measures affected women. The chapter also argues that gendered power relations and the unequal status of women often shaped citizens' attempts to negotiate the regime's coercive measures.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ I have published some of these findings in an article: "My wife had to get sterilised": exploring women's experiences of sterilisation under the Emergency in India, 1975-1977' *Contemporary South Asia*, 25.1 (2017) 70-84.

Chapters five and six assess the manifestation of the Emergency and women's engagements with it in particular spaces. Using gendered theories about the social construction of spaces and the private/public boundary, chapter five explores how the physical site of the home and domestic roles associated with it shaped women's participation in resistance to and support for the regime. Through oral history interviews, I show that homes were critical sites in the geography of the underground resistance movement. I also examine how both women's support for the Emergency and satirical depictions of this often oscillated around perceptions of their positions as household managers. Chapter six uses insights from carceral geography and a collection of women's letters to conceptualise the prison as an important site of resistance for those detained in Maharashtra. It shows that the regime imprisoned many more women than has previously been acknowledged. I also argue that these women's letters, which often position the prison as a site of political agency, community and relative physical freedom, allow for a re-reading of the prison space and the experience of preventive detention under the Emergency more broadly. The thesis concludes with some reflections on how gendered narratives have played out in Emergency memories and with suggestions for further work.

Given the scale of India, the complexity of the State of Emergency and the diversity and heterogeneity of the nation's women, this thesis is inescapably selective. The availability or scarcity of sources, wider thematic concerns and the limitations of the PhD project have driven my treatment of these events and my decision to focus on particular narratives, people and spaces. The clearest and most decisive selection is evident in my choice to restrict the rest of this thesis's focus to women. This is not to say that men and masculinities do not feature in my analysis. They figure in chapter two's discussion of dialogic pro and anti-Emergency narratives and in chapter four's exploration of the sterilisation programme. However, the dearth of women's voices in existing literature warrants this selection. As I demonstrate throughout, men's voices, men's reflections and sources that exclude women and gendered perspectives have determined our

understanding of this period thus far. The selection is necessary to begin to redraw the gendered balance.

A further caveat is important here. This thesis is not *the* history of women's Emergency experience. Such a singular history could never exist given the diversity of the category 'women'. Their experiences, perceptions and lives differ according to several other axes of social organisation including class, caste, religion, region, language and political affiliation. Rather, this thesis attempts to showcase diverse and multiple women's *histories*, which are neither monolithic nor necessarily always coherent. Competing and contradictory narratives of the regime exist alongside each other, as I put forward cases of both support and resistance. However, there are many voices that the thesis does not include. Although I present a multiplicity of stories, their main characters are usually from the same social milieu. The women discussed here are often, although not exclusively, urban, literate, educated, middle class, Hindu, high caste and connected to formal parties or organisations. There is also an overwhelming dominance of evidence about left wing women and women's experiences in Maharashtra. The narratives I include are restricted to accessible voices; many others remain unheard, at least for now. Much more work needs to be done. I set out several avenues for future research that this thesis raises in its conclusion, and in the next chapter, I explore these selections and issues around accessibility in detail. For now, I underscore that although necessarily limited and selective, the histories set out here are innovative and critical. They are a crucial first step towards a re-reading of the Emergency that not only includes women, but also acknowledges that accounting for the multiplicity of women's experiences helps to revise our broader understandings of the regime, resistance to it and its long-term consequences.

Chapter One: Methodology: locating women under Emergency

Scholars frequently comment on the lack of source material available for the Emergency period. Wendy Singer highlights that because of censorship and controversial Emergency memories, 'there are not the usual sources to elaborate'.¹ Bipan Chandra similarly opens his study with an emphasis on the 'intensely' felt absence of certain primary sources, although he also insists that 'we cannot wait for fresh historical source material to be available or unearthed'.² Reviewing a biography of Indira Gandhi, Khilnani pertinently notes that 'anyone who has tried to write about the Emergency knows that it is a hall of mirrors, where accusation and counter accusation, information and disinformation, trip over one another's heels'.³ Writing about women's experiences of the regime, which are absent from much source material as well as scholarship, is even more challenging. I use an array of methodological and theoretical approaches and sources to counter this.

Between September and December 2014, I conducted archival research in Delhi and Mumbai. I accessed the Shah Commission of Inquiry's extensive archived files at the National Archives of India, as well as collections of underground literature and other documentary evidence held in private papers at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. I utilised collections of resources at women's studies centres, including the Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW) and the Research Centre for Women's Studies at SNDT University, both in Mumbai. I also visited state archives in Delhi and Maharashtra, although only a very small amount of material relating to this period is catalogued and open to researchers there.

During this fieldwork, I conducted interviews with women about their experiences of the Emergency and resistance to it. Because this area has been the subject of so little research, I primarily approached potential respondents through established, high-profile organisations, such as the Centre for Women's Development Studies in Delhi. I had access

¹ Wendy Singer, *Independent India* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2012) 83.

² Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy*, 5-6.

³ Khilnani, 'States of Emergency', 44.

to other individuals because of their prominent roles in activism or women's studies. For instance, I approached Delhi University historian Professor Uma Chakravarti and journalist Pamela Philipose because both briefly referenced the Emergency in their contributions to a collection of memoirs on the women's movement.⁴ I recruited others through a snowball sampling technique and conducted interviews with eleven women in total. This resulted in a fairly restricted sample, the implications of which I discuss in greater depth in a later section of this chapter. All interviews were conducted in English and unstructured. They yield unique and detailed narratives about these women's experiences that cannot be found in other materials.⁵

Oral history could less easily produce evidence about pro-Emergency women given the continuing controversies surrounding these events. I hoped to utilise the All India Congress Committee (AICC) papers relating to the party's Women's Front, held at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, to address this gap. However, these were also unavailable for the period in question.⁶ A second round of fieldwork undertaken between January and April 2015 at the Library of Congress, Washington DC, compensated for this. Maya Dodd explores the presence of literature and documents relating to India and the Emergency in the USA, specifically in library collections at the University of Chicago. Many materials housed there were 'stamped with the sign PL480, Public Law 480, that allowed for the import of wheat from the US by India to be tied to the program for the acquisition of South Asian materials for American Libraries'.⁷ I consulted the Library of Congress's collection of periodicals including the INC's weekly bulletin *Socialist India*, its Women's

⁴ Ritu Menon (ed.) *Making a Difference: Memoirs from the Women's Movement in India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2001)

⁵ Throughout the thesis, I refer to the women who shared their stories with me for this project by their forenames, because of the relatively informal nature of the interviews and the very personal narratives that these produced. Elsewhere, I also refer to the women who feature in this study by their forenames where their relationship to the material in question warrants this. For instance, this occurs in some instances in chapter six, which utilises women's personal letters and correspondence.

⁶ At the time of fieldwork in autumn 2014, these were only available up until 1971.

⁷ Dodd contributed digitised versions of some of these document to Rochelle Pinto's public archives blog: 'Being Procrustes: editing and censorship during the Emergency' *Public Archives* <https://publicarchives.wordpress.com/category/emergency/> (accessed 15 May 2017); Maya Dodd 'Archives of Democracy'.

Front's monthly publication *Women on the March* (WOTM), the CPI's daily newspaper *The Patriot* and publications relating to its affiliated women's group the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW). I also utilised its extensive collections of Indian national newspapers and its holdings of *Femina*, a women's magazine belonging to the *Times of India* group.

I also consulted libraries across the UK as part of this project's fieldwork, particularly the Centre of South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge, archived collections at SOAS, the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, and the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. These mostly yielded some documentary evidence on the Emergency but very little on women's experiences, with one notable exception. The Bodleian recently acquired a microfilmed collection of documents relating to this period, collected and archived by Dr Arun Limaye and originally deposited at the Centre for Research Libraries, USA. This contains extensive documentary material, including a selection of letters sent to and from women detained as political prisoners under the Emergency in Maharashtra, primarily written in Marathi. These letters have been collected and translated into English for this PhD project and do not appear in any existing scholarship. They offer new and unique insights into women's experiences and to the history of preventive detention under regime.⁸

Because of the diversity of this material and the complex theoretical and methodological approaches I use to make sense of it, this chapter discusses the thesis's methodology in detail. It begins with a more extensive consideration of the absence of women from Emergency histories and sets out some explanations for this. I then detail how this thesis uses insights from gender and women's history. The chapter then discusses further approaches in three sections, which are commensurate with the structure of the rest of the thesis. These explain how this study locates and analyses Emergency narratives, how it traces the effects of the regime on women's bodies through archival evidence and makes the case for a spatialised reading of Emergency politics and measures.

⁸ Letters collected by myself and translated from Marathi and Hindi to English by Anisha Thomas.

1.1 'They were all pushed aside post-Emergency': Women's absence from historiography

The absence of women's voices from Emergency histories is part of a wider trend which feminist scholar Ritu Menon observes, whereby 'women's contribution to, and participation in, social and political movements has a tendency to disappear, to be subsumed in the "larger" histories, to blend into the background'.⁹ There are also some specific aspects of the Emergency experience and its dominant narratives that have contributed to the marginalisation of women's voices and gendered perspectives. Tarlo describes the post-Emergency counter narrative as 'multi-vocal', 'cobbled together from a mixture of personal experiences, underground literature, prison memoirs, public hearings and newly uncovered government documents'.¹⁰ Depictions of the Emergency and voices of dissent found public expression after March 1977. These were multi-vocal in the sense that they included reflections from Indian and international observers, from journalists, academics and students,¹¹ and from politicians and activists from across the political spectrum who were imprisoned and participated in the underground resistance movement.¹² However, men dominated this exercise in collective memory. Only a handful of women's publications on their personal experiences of the Emergency exist¹³ and fewer are regularly referred to in existing literature.¹⁴

⁹ Menon, *Making a Difference*, xxvi.

¹⁰ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 32.

¹¹ The most regularly accounts cited include scholar and journalist David Selbourne's *An Eye to India: The Unmasking of a Tyranny* (London: Penguin, 1977); Michael Henderson's *Experiment with Untruth: India under Emergency* (New Delhi: The Macmillan Company of India Ltd, 1977); John Dayal and Ajoy Bose's *For Reasons of State*.

¹² Some of the most prolific include: JP's prison diary, which was circulated underground during Emergency, see JP, *Prison Diary* A.B. Shah (ed.) (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1977); Socialist J.B. Kripalani's *The Nightmare and After* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1980); Jana Sangh leader L.K. Advani's *A Prisoner's Scrapbook* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1978); journalist Kuldip Nayar's account of his experience as a journalist and his imprisonment in *The Judgment: Inside Story of the Emergency In India* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1997); member of the banned RSS Kewalram R. Malkani's *The Midnight Knock* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978).

¹³ Snehalata Reddy's *A Prison Diary* (Karnataka: Human Rights Committee, 1977); activist Primila Lewis's diary of her imprisonment *Reason Wounded: An Experience of India's Emergency* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978); Gayatri Devi's memoirs *A Princess Remembers: The Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur* (Kolkata: Rupa & Co., 1995); Vijaya Raje Scindia's autobiography *The Last Maharani of Gwalior: An Autobiography* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1985). Journalist Coomi Kapoor also recently published an account of her experiences and the impact of Emergency on Indian journalism: *The Emergency: A Personal History* (London: Penguin, 2016).

¹⁴ Journalist, Emergency critic and Indira Gandhi's cousin Nayantara Sahgal's and journalist Promila Kalhan's works are among the only women's reflections referenced frequently. Sahgal, *Indira*

This absence of women is connected to male dominance within the Janata government's political culture. Those who participated in the anti-Emergency struggle were highly revered. Commentators and participants alike, including many within the current BJP government, often align this opposition with the anti-colonial movement, positioning the end of the regime as a 'second freedom'.¹⁵ Magazine *India Today's* election analysis noted that 'jail going, which has since the days of the freedom struggle, been venerated in Indian politics, is perhaps the greatest asset of the opposition parties. A candidate who has been clapped in jail during the Emergency draws the instant sympathy of voters'.¹⁶ Myron Weiner similarly observed that 'a certain moral aura surrounded many of the Janata parliamentary candidates, a majority of whom had spent much of the previous eighteen months in jail'.¹⁷ Leaders of resistance and those who gained prominent positions in post-Emergency politics and public life have been the primary archivists and authors of this history. A small number of women who were active in the underground movement did take up positions in the Janata government, such as the Socialist Party's Mrinal Gore and CPI (M) leader Ahilya Rangnekar. However, very few women contested this critical election. The *Statesman Weekly* reported that 'whether the election proves to be the turning point in the nation's political history or not, it will be making no contribution to the social issue of women's equality'. It highlighted both the very small numbers of women contesting across various parties and the lack of attention given to women's status in each of their manifestos.¹⁸ The Janata government that took office in March 1977 had the lowest number of women in parliament, and it continues to hold that record.

Gandhi: Tryst with Power (1982) (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012); Kalhan, *Black Wednesday: Power Politics, Emergency and Elections* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1977).

¹⁵ See for example, M.G Devasahayam's book *India's Second Freedom: An Untold Saga* (Delhi: Siddharth Publications, 2004); Rajagopal, 'Sangh's Role in the Emergency', 2797-2798.

¹⁶ 'General Election: Racing to a Photo Finish' *India Today* (16-31 March 1977) 10.

¹⁷ Myron Weiner, 'The 1977 Parliamentary Elections in India' *Asian Survey*, 17.7 (1977) 622.

¹⁸ 'It's Still a Man's World' *The Statesman Weekly* (26 February 1977).

Year	Number of Women MPS	Percentage of Women MPs
1951	22	4.5
1957	22	4.45
1962	31	6.28
1967	29	5.58
1971	28	5.41
1977	19	3.51
1980	28	5.29
1984	43	7.95
1989	29	5.48
1991	39	7.30
1996	40	7.37
1998	43	7.92
1999	49	9.02
2004	45	8.29
2009	59	10.87
2014	66	12.15

Table 1.1: Number (and percentage) of women in each *Lok Sabha*, 1951-2014¹⁹

One of the women interviewed for this project pointed out that women's limited access to political power is connected to the marginalisation of their Emergency narratives. Dr Ranjana Kumari, feminist activist, scholar and head of the Delhi based Centre for Social Research, was active in JP's movement and in underground activism against the Emergency as a Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student. Over tea in her office, Ranjana spoke enthusiastically about women's participation in these resistance activities, as she told me, 'there were a lot of women who were very, very active'. However, she also asserted that 'of course, they were all pushed aside post-Emergency; they were never accorded any proper positions in politics. All these men became ministers, MPs'. Whilst she insisted that gender equality was part of the JP movement's wider agenda, Ranjana also stated, 'when they got to power, attention to gender was out of the window. Because the system gets controlled by these men'. This not only marginalised women from political power, but also meant that their experiences often went unrecorded: 'During the movement, we were like

¹⁹ Data taken from Bhanupriya Rao, 'Women MPs in Lok Sabha: How have the numbers changed?' *Factly* <https://factly.in/women-mps-in-lok-sabha-how-have-the-numbers-changed/> (accessed 13 May 2016).

equals, but not after the movement...so many of them not even recognised, not even written about, it is sad.'²⁰

Although recent scholarship has focused on this resistance movement, it hardly references women's participation in it. Their voices and a recognition of their involvement are missing from primary materials, which mostly include the public reflections and archived private papers of male leaders. Ramachandra Guha's chapter draws extensively on such archived papers and refers to women only occasionally since they feature infrequently within these materials.²¹ He cites Marathi writer Durga Bhagwat's arrest and a *satyagraha* (non-violent resistance) campaign led by Maniben Patel, daughter of the nation's first Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel.²² Guha also refers to the imprisonment of two Rajmatas, Gayatri Devi and Vijaya Raje Scindia, and Mrinal Gore's detention. The Shah Commission of Inquiry also rarely featured testimony about women's experiences, except where these pertained to very elite or exceptional women. The Commission investigated Gayatri Devi's case and featured this in one of its published reports, no doubt because of her royal status.²³

Further, where women do feature within these sources and scholarship the emphasis often remains on their position as victims of the state's repressive measures, rather than their active participation in anti or pro-Emergency activities. Guha's reference to Mrinal Gore, for instance, does not mention her involvement in resistance during her time in hiding underground between June and December 1975. He cites her case only to underscore the regime's mistreatment of political prisoners, who were 'fed and clothed like common criminals', as she 'was asked to share a toilet with the woman in the adjoining cell – who happened to be a leper. In the cell opposite was a lady lunatic who wore no clothes and shrieked day and night'.²⁴

²⁰ Ranjana Kumari, Interview with Author (New Delhi: October 2014).

²¹ The H.V. Kamath, Hari Dev Sharma and Jayaprakesh Narayan Papers housed at NMML are particularly rich in anti-Emergency materials.

²² Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 505.

²³ *Shah Commission of Inquiry: Interim Report I* (New Delhi: Government of India, 11 March 1978) 78-82.

²⁴ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 498-499.

As scholarship on the Emergency tends not to account for women, the literature on the Indian women's movement often ignores the Emergency period. This movement has a long history: 'historians of the movement will say its real genesis lay in social reform movements of the nineteenth century, that it cut its political teeth during the freedom struggle and the nationalist movement of the early twentieth century.'²⁵ Most trace contemporary women's activism in India to those nineteenth century social reform movements, to organisations like the All India Women's Conference founded in 1924, and to the mass participation of women in anti-colonial struggles and civil disobedience movements during the 1930s.²⁶

However, observers and participants often differentiate these earlier activities from the movement's 'second phase', generally accepted to have begun in the late 1970s. They usually distinguish this phase because of its autonomous nature and increasing concern with violence against women. Groups emerged independent of political parties and they positioned issues that might previously have been located in the context of class oppression as symptomatic of gender inequalities.²⁷ The Emergency is consistently described as a catalyst for this contemporary phase. Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah claim, 'it was only after the State of Emergency (1975) or the suspension of civil rights was lifted and the Indira Gandhi government electorally lost to the Janata...that the new consciousness of women and on women's issues concretised into a host of small voluntary women's groups'.²⁸ The memoirs collected by Ritu Menon also emphasise this shift, frequently positioning the regime as context to the mobilisation of women that followed post-1977. Gabriele Dietrich, a Berlin born activist working in Tamil Nadu in 1975, asserted that 'Jayaprakash Narayan's Total Revolution struggle against the Emergency galvanised enthusiastic participation...there seemed to be a space opening up for independent voices of

²⁵ Menon, 'Introduction', xiii.

²⁶ Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, *Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991) 16-18.

²⁷ See Ibid., 18-22; Menon, 'Introduction', xiii.

²⁸ Gandhi and Shah, *Theory and Practice*, 20.

transformation', a space which emergent women's groups contributed to filling.²⁹ Vasanth Kannabiran, an Andhra Pradesh activist, similarly used the Emergency as a starting point in her narrative of local women's politics: 'After the Emergency was lifted in 1977 several women (some had been politically active in revolutionary movements) feeling the need for a meaningful forum, came together to start a women's group.'³⁰

This periodisation fits with broader observations about the importance of the regime's repressive measures, and opposition to them, in facilitating the proliferation of civil rights groups and agendas after March 1977, epitomised in JP's formation of human rights group the People's Union for Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights. It positions women's Emergency experiences as important catalysts for their feminist sympathies and activism in the years that followed, but does not expand on the nature of these experiences. This absence reflects the view that the years between independence and the post-Emergency period were silent ones for women's struggles. Women's studies Professor Neera Desai, for instance, asserted that especially for the middle classes, 'the immediate impact of political freedom was the generation of hope and confidence among women regarding their future. There was no need, it was felt by many, of an active women's movement to press their demands'.³¹ Feminist scholar Vina Mazumdar similarly claimed that 'for the women of my generation, the acceptance of gender equality in the constitution was the fulfilment of a dream'. Observing the 'fading out of the movement's militancy after the 1950s', Mazumdar positions the Emergency as a turning point: 'Significantly, it was the shock of the national Emergency...with the suspension of fundamental rights of citizens that was to reawaken the women's movement from its two decade long slumber.'³²

²⁹ Gabriele Dietrich, 'Upholding Each Other' in Menon (ed.) *Memoirs from the Women's Movement in India*, 10.

³⁰ Vasanth Kannabiran, 'Confessions of an Unrepentant Feminist' in Ibid., 124.

³¹ Neera Desai, 'From Accommodation to Articulation: Women's Movement in India' in Mary E. John (ed.) *Women's Studies in India: A Reader* (Haryana: Penguin Random House, 2008) 23.

³² Vina Mazumdar, 'Political Ideology of the Women's Movement's Engagement with Law' in Amita Dhanda & Archana Parishar (ed.) *Engendering Laws: Essays in Honour of Lotika Sarkar* (Lucknow: Eastern Book Co, 1999) 5.

However, women's activism was not dormant between independence and 1977. Mounting crises for the Indian state characterised the years preceding Gandhi's declaration of Emergency in June 1975. They also witnessed a range of people's movements, in which women often played significant and leading roles.³³ Mallarika Sinha Roy explores gendered mobilisations and women's militant activism during the Maoist Naxalite uprisings that began in West Bengal from 1967.³⁴ During the Chipko campaign in 1974, women from the village of Renu in UP surrounded trees to protest against deforestation.³⁵ Women also participated in the unrest that directly preceded Gandhi's imposition of Emergency. The Railway Strike of 1974 'witnessed the active involvement of women of the striking workers' families in organising pickets, taking part in *dharnas* (sit-in protests), facing police attacks and so on'.³⁶ Niroj Sinha shows that women were similarly active in the JP-led agitations in Bihar that erupted in the same year, as they courted arrest, participated in processions and launched hunger strikes.³⁷

Irina Sen addresses the disjuncture between these instances of activism and the formal emergence of the contemporary women's movement that appears in most scholarship. She notes that 'if we examine these movements using the yardsticks of conventional 'feminism' centring around what people see as 'narrow' or 'one-dimensional' women's issues – we are often disappointed'.³⁸ However, Sen insists that accounting for women's roles in these movements and the multiple factors that encouraged their participation might actually generate 'a perspective on the women's movement that is more

³³ For a summary of women's participation in such protests and movements, see *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*, 2-3.

³⁴ Mallarika Sinha Roy, *Gender and Radical Politics in India Magic Moments of Naxalbari (1967-1975)* (London: Routledge, 2001).

³⁵ Shobhita Jain, 'Women and People's Ecological Movement: A Case Study of Women's Role in the Chipko Movement in Uttar Pradesh' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19.41 (1984) 1788-1794.

³⁶ Nivedita Menon, 'Women in the Trade Unions: A Study of the AITUC, INTUC & CITUC' *Indian Association of Women's Studies Third National Conference* (October 1986) 10.

³⁷ Niroj Sinha, 'Women's Participation and Political Development in India: A Case Study of the Total Revolution Movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan in Bihar 1974' *Indian Association of Women's Studies Second National Conference* (Trivandrum: April 1974).

³⁸ Irina Sen (ed.) *A Space Within the Struggle: Women's Participation in People's Movements* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990) 4.

truly representative of the generality of Indian women'.³⁹ For Sen, feminist scholarship must account for these instances where women emerge as politicised and active agents on various issues. She claims that irrespective of whether movement ideologies overtly attack patriarchal norms, 'the call for women to break out of their traditional housebound roles and assume responsibility for social action in itself represents at least the beginnings of an attack on patriarchy'.⁴⁰

The early 1970s also witnessed women's activism on what might be described more explicitly as 'women's issues'. Mobilisations under the APRM were distinctly gendered. The movement focused on hardships faced by housewives and was most visible in the crowds of women marching through streets banging *thalis* (dishes) and rolling pins in protest.⁴¹ In 1974, women from Osmania University in Hyderabad, who participated in anti-price rise campaigns the previous year, formed the Progressive Organisation of Women (POW). Although some of its members had Naxalite connections and others participated in left wing student protest, the group mobilised on distinctly gendered terms. One of its founding members K Lalitha recalled, 'they were very clear that they would work together with male comrades but never merge with them'.⁴² The group's activities also reflected this standpoint. In September 1974, they launched an anti-dowry campaign where members distributed leaflets, organised protest marches and held a public meeting of over 700 women. An anti-eve teasing programme in October and an anti-obscenity campaign in January 1975 followed, where members organised pickets and courted arrest outside film releases and bookshops. This activism extended beyond the university. The group also mobilised women from slums in anti-price rise marches and in March 1975, the POW led a procession of over 600 women to the Municipality office demanding water.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁴¹ Gandhi, 'Masses of Women, but where is the Movement?'

⁴² K. Lalitha, 'Women in Revolt: A Historical Analysis of the Progressive Organisation of Women in Andhra Pradesh' in Mary E. John (ed.) *Women's Studies in India: A Reader* (Haryana: Penguin Random House, 2008) 36.

⁴³ Ibid., 35-38.

This organisation also became embroiled in the politics of Emergency, which the POW protested against after June 1975. Because some of its leadership had connections with newly banned Marxist-Leninist groups, connections that Lalitha has since described as a 'mistake committed by the POW organisers',⁴⁴ many members went underground and 'the police succeeded in branding the organisation itself as a front of the underground party'. Subsequent police monitoring and intimidation drastically curtailed its activities. Authorities arrested the group's President on the grounds that she was engaging in anti-social activities and detained her for eighteen days, in which 'she was humiliated, beaten up and ill-treated by police officers'.⁴⁵ The organisation published and distributed leaflets protesting this arrest and torture. By the beginning of 1976, authorities arrested more of its leadership and because of repressive measures, 'practically all of the activities of the organisation came to a halt'. After just one issue, censors stopped its bulletin and the organisation was swiftly paralysed. The POW and its activities provide a useful example of lively women's activism motivated by issues around women's rights and status in the early 1970s.⁴⁶ It also highlights women's participation in resistance to the State of Emergency and the impact of its measures on women's political mobilisation.

1.2 'Herstories' and gendering the Emergency

Gender and women's history are distinct, although related, fields of study. The heightened political awareness that accompanied the proliferation of feminist activism and scholarship from the 1970s transformed women's history 'from a minority strand in historical practice to a widespread intellectual movement'.⁴⁷ Academic interests and political convictions converged in scholars' attempts to counter the marginalisation of women in historical study and bring 'herstories' to the forefront, valuing women's roles as historical subjects worthy of

⁴⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ For a further discussion of the group in the context of the women's movement, see Vibhuti Patel, 'Emergence and Proliferation of Autonomous Women's Groups (1974-1984)' in Neera Desai (ed.) *A Decade of Women's Movement in India* (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1988) 117-129.

⁴⁷ Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (2004) (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 21.

analysis and as agents in the construction of histories.⁴⁸ Women's history in India, argues Aparna Basu, began as such an 'act of reclamation'.⁴⁹ Historians have done considerable work to illuminate women's roles as political and historical subjects in key moments of national politics, such as the nationalist movement.⁵⁰ Some chapters of this thesis might be described as 'herstories' of the Emergency. They represent the first sustained attempt to explore women's experiences of the regime and their participation in its politics. This is a critical intervention given the absence of women within existing literature, although this methodology also raises issues that need to be addressed.

Such a separate examination risks isolating women, perpetuating their location in a separate sphere and confirming their marginalised position in relation to the dominance of histories based on men's actions. In his seminal work on Indian nationalism, Partha Chatterjee highlights a tension for historians studying women's roles in this movement. 'By working from the conventional archives of political history', he claims, 'women appear in the history of nationalism only in a contributory role...All one can assert is that women also took an active part in the nationalist struggle'.⁵¹ Turning away from these conventional archives to women's writings, Chatterjee hopes to avoid what Gerda Lerner terms 'contributory' or 'compensatory' histories; those that describe women's 'contribution to, their status in, and their oppression by a male-defined society' but leave the patriarchal underpinnings of that society unquestioned.⁵² Many feminist historians aim instead towards what Margaret Strobel and Marjorie Bingham describe as 'the most difficult task': 'that of writing

⁴⁸ Joan Wallach Scott, 'Women's History' in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 15.

⁴⁹ Aparna Basu, 'Women's History in India: An Historiographical Survey' in Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall (eds.) *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives* in (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991) 181.

⁵⁰ For example, see Gail Minault, 'Purdah Politics: The Role of Muslim Women in Indian Nationalism, 1911-1924' in Gail Minault and Hanna Papanek (eds.) *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia* (New Delhi: Chanakya Publishers, 1982) 245-261; Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Women's Battle for Freedom* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1982); Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, 'Women as Activists; Women as Symbols: A Study of the Indian Nationalist Movement' *Feminist Review*, 44 (1993) 81-96; Durba Ghosh, 'Revolutionary Women and Nationalist Heroes in Bengal, 1930s to the 1980s' *Gender and History*, 25.2 (2013) 355-375.

⁵¹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 137.

⁵² Gerda Lerner, 'The Majority Finds its Past' *Current History*, 70.416 (May 1976) 194.

transformative women's history in which the fundamental understanding of a period (or periodisation) is reshaped by taking women into account'.⁵³ Chatterjee's analysis of the nationalist movement is, in this sense, a transformative history, since it not only moves away from conventional archives and towards women's voices, but also positions women, women's issues and gendered narratives at the heart of the emergence of Bengali nationalism in the nineteenth century.

The designation of 'woman' as a pre-determined and inherently political category is also often a simplification of the complex factors at work in a given historical context. Joan Wallach Scott illustrates this tension by interrogating claims that women's participation in mixed political crowds automatically indicates a collective feminist consciousness: 'the physical presence of females is not always a sure sign that "women" are a separate political category, that they have been mobilised as women'.⁵⁴ Such a separation raises important questions about the problematic assumption that women constitute a homogenous group, shaped universally by gendered identity at the expense of other axes of power and social organisation such as class, race, religion, age, location and political affiliation. This is particularly important in postcolonial contexts and for thinking critically about the implications of writing women's histories 'under western eyes'. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that 'western feminist writing about women in the third world must be considered in the context of the global hegemony of western scholarship'.⁵⁵ She cautions against the construction of the identity of 'women' in the third world as singular or monolithic, and against the 'implicitly (consensual) priority of issues around which women are apparently expected to organise'.⁵⁶ For Mohanty, the solution to this western hegemony lies in the centrality of geographical, historical, socio-economic and political contexts. The danger

⁵³ Margaret Strobel and Marjorie Bingham, 'The Theory and Practice of Women's History and Gender History in Global Perspective' in Bonnie G. Smith (ed.) *Women's History in Global Perspective* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004) 13.

⁵⁴ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 212.

⁵⁵ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (eds.) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991) 55.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

stems largely from assumptions that women, especially third world women, comprise an already constituted category, a coherent group with identical interests and desires irrespective of other factors. Such assumptions mean that the 'discursively consensual homogeneity of "women" as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women'.⁵⁷

Although I investigate 'women' as a category, throughout the thesis I contextualise the women under discussion in terms of their specific material realities: regional location, political affiliation, socio-economic status, including class and caste, and their position in relation to the historical and political specificities of the Emergency. The next chapter, for instance, places my analysis of the regime's gendered narratives and iconographies in the particular contexts of gendered nationalism, *Bharat Mata* and Gandhi's female leadership. Chapter four's discussion of reproduction is placed in the larger historical and international contexts of family planning policies and development in India, and chapter five's analysis of the home foregrounds the specific political associations of home spaces, domestic roles and the middle class housewife in the Indian national imaginary. By focusing on the gendered nature of the politics of this regime as well as the activities of women under it, I also interrogate the dominant and specific constructions of femininity and woman as a category during this period. Indeed, several of these issues can be somewhat alleviated by a synthesis of perspectives from women's and gender history.

Gender is widely theorised as a social, historical and cultural construction, as a set of relations and identities that are distinct from the sexed body. As Simone de Beauvoir famously stated, 'one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman'.⁵⁸ The separation of the sexed body from this cultural process of becoming has been a critical output of feminist theorising. Judith Butler argues that the materiality of the body is 'distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings', and she conceptualises gender as a performance: 'acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts

⁵⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1974) 38.

within theatrical contexts.’⁵⁹ The notion that gender is constructed by a ‘stylized repetition of acts through time’ underscores the possibility of transforming naturalised ideas about heteronormative gendered identities. If these acts are indeed constituted, they are also ‘capable of being constituted differently’.⁶⁰ Desires to expose the prescriptive structures, discourses and institutions that govern gendered performances and to question limited, binary understandings of masculinity and femininity have driven feminist theories of gender as a construction.

Butler’s theory is especially pertinent for the next chapter’s discussion of the gendered performances of Emergency politics. As a performance produced through particular acts, gestures and language, it follows that gender manifests physical and discursive realities that can be subject to historical study and inform us about the various contexts that govern those performances. As Susan Kingsley Kent asserts, ‘historians can demonstrate where the “expressions” of gender Butler speaks of come from’.⁶¹ Butler’s theory of performative gender is also useful for avoiding some of the homogenising assumptions that Mohanty cautions against. As ‘gender is always a doing’, it is a constant process that remains tied to and constrained by given historical, social and political frameworks and contexts: ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.’⁶² Such a conception recognises both the constraints that govern gendered performance and the unstable nature of the category ‘woman’. It also underscores that this category is not coherent across different categories such as race, class and ethnicity.

Joan Wallach Scott advocated the use of gender as a tool for historical analysis, to enable historians to negotiate the issues raised by a separate examination of women’s history. As such a tool, gender functions as both a ‘constitutive element of social

⁵⁹ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’ *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988) 521.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 520.

⁶¹ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and History* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2012) 77.

⁶² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) 25.

relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes' and 'a primary way of signifying relationships of power'.⁶³ Feminist histories need not confine themselves to adding women's separate experiences to the historical record. They also illuminate how gendered identities and power relations shape and explain political events and historical continuities and changes: 'political history has, in a sense, been enacted on the field of gender'.⁶⁴ These arguments speak to a broader shift within the field, from recording women's experiences to charting the 'history of the social relations of the sexes, and the social/historical construction of male and female identities in relation to one another'.⁶⁵ The parameters of gender history as Scott defined them have heavily influenced this thesis's approach and particularly my decision to frame explorations of women's Emergency activities and experiences with the next chapter, which discusses the importance of gender and gendered relations as signifiers of its politics. There I demonstrate that gendered identities and discourses shaped the dominant narratives of both the Emergency regime and opposition to it. Women and gendered narratives are not contributory in this history nor can they simply be added to the existing historical record. Rather, they reshape our understandings of the Emergency and its politics.

Gendered analyses have been extremely influential in historical scholarship, shifting focus 'from the particular realm of women's history into broader histories of human society, where the divisions and orderings of gender constitute a key axis of analysis and insight'.⁶⁶ Yet few scholars have asked how gender shaped India's Emergency, how it affected the nation's women or how they responded to it. This is surprising given the now established prominence of analyses from these perspectives in relation to other moments of colonial and postcolonial Indian history. For instance, Samita Sen has productively applied these perspectives to understanding labour in colonial India,⁶⁷ and earlier in this chapter, I

⁶³ Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', 1067.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1074.

⁶⁵ Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 184.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 185.

⁶⁷ Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

highlighted a proliferation of 'herstories' in relation to Indian nationalism.⁶⁸ Scholars have also frequently examined partition from a gendered perspective and several studies have shown that the violence and politics of partition played out in gendered narratives and on women's bodies.⁶⁹ Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais's recent project on the Bengal diaspora addresses the critical roles played by women in the migrations and displacements that followed partition, not only as cultural symbols but also as active agents precipitating cultural change.⁷⁰ Several aspects of the Emergency regime beg explicitly gendered questions. A female leader presided over this period of authoritarian rule in 1975, when India and many other countries around the world participated in the UN's International Women's Year (IWY) celebrations. In the same year, the government appointed Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), which began its survey of women's position in 1971, submitted its report entitled *Towards Equality* to parliament.⁷¹ One of the Emergency's most infamous and controversial policies, coercive sterilisation under the name of family planning, is also an issue that has historically been central in both feminist scholarship and activism.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan is one of the few scholars to hold a gendered lens to this period through her discussion of its leadership. In her 1993 study, she highlighted that Gandhi's 'historical importance as a woman leader of a postcolonial democratic nation and as an influential third world political figure has not yet been subjected to extended feminist enquiry', with many analyses insufficiently grounded in feminist theory.⁷² There are several explanations for this gap. Female leaders are elite, isolated examples and this often proves a problem for feminist opposition to individualism and the elite subject in power. To address

⁶⁸ See p30 of this thesis.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998); Ritu Menon and Kamla Basin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998); Kavita Daiya, *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender and National Culture in Postcolonial India* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).

⁷⁰ Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais, "'Always/already migrants': Brides, marriage and migration' in *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration* (London: Routledge, 2016) 135.

⁷¹ CSWI, *Towards Equality* (New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Social Welfare, 1975).

⁷² Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 103.

this gap and examine how gendered paradigms shaped Gandhi's leadership and perceptions of it, Sunder Rajan draws from literary and cultural texts. As a crucial period within her leadership, the Emergency features in Sunder Rajan's analysis although it is not its focus. Her discussion of O.V. Vijayan's short story 'The Foetus', and specifically the story's use of gendered identities such as motherhood and widowhood to criticise the Emergency, suggests that the gendered relations through which Sunder Rajan understands Gandhi's position are relevant to a broader assessment of Emergency politics.

Trina Nileena Banerjee's recent article draws on this and charts how gendered religious iconographies played out during Gandhi's Emergency leadership. Banerjee highlights a further reason that scholarship on this lacks a gendered perspective: 'the association of a female political leader with perhaps the single-most repressive period in the political history of post-independence India leads to an inevitable rethinking of the straightforward liberal feminist notion of female political agency as positive in itself'.⁷³ She further claims that feminists face difficulties in attempting to read a leader 'who did nothing historically for the larger interests of marginalised women's groups, as well as for "sisterhood"'.⁷⁴ In chapter three of this thesis, I argue that notions of sisterhood were actually critical to Gandhi's political strategies during the Emergency, as the Congress sought to mobilise women's support for the regime and its measures.

Both Banerjee's and Sunder Rajan's discussions emerge from gendered readings of female leadership. Even where they account for criticism of the regime they remain largely confined to the figurehead. I situate gendered narratives as more pervasive, as my readings extend beyond the female leader to the Emergency's national discourses. The large body of scholarship that locates the Indian nation as a gendered construction supports this extension. Since Benedict Anderson conceptualised nations and nationalisms as social, historical and political constructs, scholars have deployed the idea of the 'imagined community' to explain the formation of its physical space and the collective identities,

⁷³ Banerjee, 'Political Iconography and the Female Political Leader'.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

nationalist movements and patriotic sentiments attached to these spaces.⁷⁵ Interventions within this field, particularly from postcolonial and feminist scholars, have questioned the Eurocentric and male-dominated perspectives of these theories and highlighted the centrality of gender to these national constructions.⁷⁶

We cannot understand nations and nationalisms without attention to gender, and men and women often participate differently in the national project.⁷⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis identifies five ways in which women and gendered roles shape the construction of nations. Two of these relate to women's physical bodies, which literally reproduce citizens and act as markers of national boundaries and borders. Yuval-Davis also highlights the roles women play as transmitters of national cultures, active participants in nationalist movements and as symbols of national values.⁷⁸ Explorations of these gendered national symbols are among the most prolific and influential interventions of feminist scholars on understandings of nationalisms and nations.

These interventions have influenced scholarship on the nationalist ideologies and narratives that shaped anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial nation states and the Indian subcontinent features prominently in this literature.⁷⁹ Partha Chatterjee shows that

⁷⁵ Such theories have been the subject of intense scholarly debate and it is beyond the limits of this chapter to set these out in detail. It is however, important to note the emergence of this conception of the nation as a social construct, as this remains dominant and influential across these debates and is an important foundation for gendered analyses. Some of the key texts that contributed to these theories include: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) (London: Verso, 2006); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983); Anthony D Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Eric J Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁷⁶ For instance, see Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* and Anne McClintock, 'No Longer in a Future Haven: Gender, Race and Nationalism' in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (eds.) *Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 89-112.

⁷⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the developments in scholarship on this, see Tamar Mayer, 'Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Setting the Stage' in Tamar Mayer (ed.) *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000) 1-25.

⁷⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997) 22-24.

⁷⁹ Some examples include Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism and the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986); McClintock, Mufti and Shohat (eds.) *Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*; Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri (eds.) *Gender, Nation, Empire and Colony* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998); Sangeeta Ray, *En-gendering the Nation: Women and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives* (London: Duke University Press, 2000); Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

'women's issues' like marriage laws, the age of consent and the practice of *sati* (widow immolation) became sites of contestation between British colonial authorities and Bengali nationalists in the nineteenth century.⁸⁰ Tanika Sarkar similarly examines the role of dominant conceptions of womanhood in shaping the Indian nation.⁸¹ Other scholarship assesses the role of masculinities and femininities in the colonial relationship, informed by Edward Said's brief references to this in his work on orientalism and Ronald Inden's detailed examination of the Indian context.⁸² Mrinalini Sinha, for instance, examines the construction of Bengali men as effeminate in opposition to the 'manly Englishman' as an essential facet of British rule in the region in the nineteenth century.⁸³ Sikata Banerjee observes similar gendered narratives and power structures in the interplay between these colonial constructions and an oppositional, masculinist Hindu nationalism.⁸⁴

The role that these narratives play within the politics of the postcolonial state has been explored much less. How do gendered identities play out in political narratives, national identities and movements against the government after independence? Do gendered symbols feature in critical moments in national politics, such as the State of Emergency? Existing literature demonstrates that these gendered narratives continue to shape the Indian nation and elements of its politics today. Both Banerjee and Sarkar, for instance, emphasise the historical trajectory between these narratives and the dominant gendered discourses of contemporary *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalist) ideologies.⁸⁵ It is in the context of these theories of the gendered nation that this thesis argues for a gendered reading of the Emergency and its politics.

⁸⁰ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 116-134.

⁸¹ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (London: Hurst & Co., 2001).

⁸² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) (London: Penguin Books, 1995); Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (London: Hurst & Co., 1990).

⁸³ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁸⁴ Sikata Banerjee, *'Make me a Man' Masculinity, Hinduism and Nationalism in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

⁸⁵ Ibid.; Tanika Sarkar, 'Women, Community and Nation: A Historical Trajectory for Hindu Identity Politics' in Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu (eds.) *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicised Religion in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 1998) 89-105.

However, analyses framed exclusively from these perspectives can pose a problem in relation to women's agency, which remains absent from both Sunder Rajan and Trina Nileena Banerjee's discussions. After his exploration of nationalism's gendered discourses, Partha Chatterjee notes, 'the nationalist discourse we have heard so far is about women; women do not speak here'.⁸⁶ Some statements about the importance of this gendered symbolism, such as Anne McClintock's assertion that 'women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency', fail to account for women's active participation in these national moments.⁸⁷ The emphasis on women's symbolic roles can eclipse the material realities of their lives and everyday participation in the nation state. As well as recognising the gendered symbolism of Emergency narratives, we must also account for the ways in which women actually engaged with these dominant narratives and this regime. It was primarily because of these issues surrounding women's agency and the need to underscore their roles as historical actors that not all feminist historians embraced Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott's interventions.⁸⁸

It is possible to account for both the symbolic importance of gendered identities in specific national moments and the realities of women's participation in these. This thesis aims for such a synthesis. Sunder Rajan insists that 'our understanding of the problems of "real women" cannot lie outside the "imagined" constructs through which "women" emerge as subjects'.⁸⁹ I frame later discussions of women's embodied and lived experiences of the Emergency with two chapters on the construction of gendered identities and women's roles within the regime's dominant political narratives.

⁸⁶ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 132.

⁸⁷ Anne McClintock, 'Gender, Race and Nationalism', 90.

⁸⁸ Some of the most prolific rejections of this turn towards gendered narratives include Laura Lee Downs, 'If "Woman" is just an Empty Category, then why am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35.2 (1993) 414-437; Joan Hoff, 'Gender as a Postmodern Category of Paralysis' *Women's History Review*, 3.2 (1994) 149-168.

⁸⁹ Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 7.

1.3 'Swamped with propaganda': Discourse analysis and Emergency narratives

Ramachandra Guha describes the Emergency as 'a script, jointly authored by JP and Mrs Gandhi', to suggest that both parties were mutually responsible for precipitating the crisis in democracy that came to a head in June 1975.⁹⁰ This definition of the regime as a 'script' does more than illuminate the central protagonists in these events. It underscores the importance of words, discourses and narratives to Emergency politics. The metaphor is particularly appropriate given that so much of the Emergency's power structure revolved around the Congress government's monopoly on the right to speak and its attempts to silence dissenting voices. This began overnight on 25 June 1975, when authorities arrested members of opposition parties and detained these and other dissenters without trial, in what one commentator described as a 'vigorous drive to silence all opposition'.⁹¹ In the days that followed, Central Government banned twenty-six organisations deemed 'anti-national'⁹² and barred public meetings of more than five people.⁹³ Even political parties and organisations not formally banned struggled to function because of these restrictions and with much of their leadership in jail.⁹⁴ In September 1975, a report in *The Guardian* asserted that the Emergency was 'rapidly becoming the mystery of the missing opposition...throughout the vastness of the country hardly a cheep of dissent breaks the silence'.⁹⁵ Much evidence presented in this thesis and elsewhere highlights lively cultures of underground resistance, but these comments demonstrate the difficulty of publicly articulating that opposition.

⁹⁰ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 497.

⁹¹ Bernard Levin, 'Series on Emergency' *The Times* (3 November 1978).

⁹² The Congress Party reported on this ban on organisations belonging to the extreme right and left of the political spectrum. Authorities raided their headquarters and arrested their members under the Defence of India Rules. See 'Spotlight on Extremists: The welcome ban' *Socialist India*, 11.6 (12 July 1975) 3-4.

⁹³ Nayantara Sahgal recorded that 'meetings of more than five persons without permission were forbidden, an unrealistic ban in overcrowded market areas where the streets team with human beings. It was rigorously enforced where it could be.' (*Tryst with Power*, 228).

⁹⁴ 'State of Emergency Declared: Several leaders arrested' *Times of India* (27 June 1975).

⁹⁵ 'Only a few dogs keep on barking' *The Guardian* (20 September 1975) in *Swaraj*, No. 8 (September 1975), JP papers, Press Clippings file No 14, NMML.

Gandhi's institution of stringent press censorship ensured this difficulty. On 25 June, authorities cut electricity supplies to newspaper headquarters in Delhi and the government's Censor Office instituted press guidelines.⁹⁶ In December 1975, it consolidated these restrictions with the Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Ordinance (replaced by an Act in 1976). This prevented the production and distribution of materials deemed unfavourable to the Emergency, Gandhi's government and its policies.⁹⁷ The subjects banned by pre-censorship guidelines or refused publication in individual censor orders were wide ranging. They covered the regime's most infamous policies including slum demolition, sterilisation and arrests, so that journalists could only report on these matters favourably or briefly. A censor order dated 9 September 1975 placed 'all reports, features, photos and captions about demolitions of *jhuggis* (slums) in Delhi' under pre-censorship. Another issued on 1 April 1976 ordered 'no criticism of family planning programme'. On 12 August 1976, the Censor's Office banned reports on a hunger strike by political prisoners in Presidency Jail, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta). Censor orders also prohibited comments on parliamentary proceedings, any instances of opposition and the actions of particular individuals.⁹⁸ The Janata government's investigation into the Emergency's restrictions on the media concluded that 'a serious legislative assault was mounted on the press'.⁹⁹ Government enacted this assault through these orders and by withholding advertising from its Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP) to penalise publications that refused to comply. Janata's investigation further revealed that authorities harassed journalists and editors and arrested 170 people working in the media.¹⁰⁰ Central

⁹⁶ Journalist Kuldip Nayar, who authorities arrested during the Emergency, describes the restriction of power supply to newspaper offices in Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi along with his experiences of censorship and imprisonment in *The Judgment*, vii.

⁹⁷ *White Paper on Misuse of Mass Media during the Internal Emergency* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1977) 15.

⁹⁸ For these examples and an extensive list of censor orders placing subjects under categories of pre-censorship, ban and news management, see 'Oral Censor Orders' in Sajal Basu (ed.) *Underground Literature during Indian Emergency* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates Publications, 1978) 102-114.

⁹⁹ *White Paper on Misuse of Mass Media*, 15.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

Government also evicted or refused entry to international journalists deemed unfavourable to the regime, including BBC correspondent Mark Tully.¹⁰¹

In a speech in the *Rajya Sabha* (upper house of parliament) in January 1976, Gandhi foregrounded censorship in her justifications for imposing the Emergency:

The Emergency was declared not because we wanted to declare it. The Emergency was declared not because we are afraid of elections, not because we are afraid of abuse or false allegations...Please look at the newspapers, the national newspapers, and see what kind of falsehood, what kind of misinterpretation was found in the press.¹⁰²

The 'license' of the press, which Congress spokespersons frequently criticised during this period, was a primary motivation for the declaration of Emergency rule. Gandhi also emphasised the importance of censorship for the regime's success, stating, 'it is obvious that the opposition movement was not merely getting publicity, but was actually built up by our press; and it is because we denied the opposition the benefit of this, their special type of publicity, that the Emergency has succeeded'.¹⁰³

After June 1975, this 'special type of publicity' was reserved for Gandhi, the Congress and pro-Emergency sentiments. A plethora of widely publicised speeches and writings followed the declaration of Emergency. Guha notes that the gap created by censorship 'had to be filled, and it was, by the words of the Prime Minister and by stories in praise of her government'.¹⁰⁴ Only voices echoing Gandhi's and the government's position were viable and allowed expression. In August 1976, underground newspaper *Satya Samachar* (True News) condemned censorship and insisted, 'we have had in the last few months a fast flowing stream of jargon emanating from the mouths of our politicians, radio and TV commentators and from the Information Ministry'.¹⁰⁵ One journalist noted that 'under

¹⁰¹ Correspondence between the British High Commission in Delhi and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during this period compiled a list of at least fifteen journalists expelled from the country as a result of Emergency measures, including Tully and reporters from *The Guardian* and *The Sunday Telegraph*. 'Foreign Journalists in India', FCO 37/1750, National Archives (UK).

¹⁰² Indira Gandhi, 'Functioning within the constitution', Reply to debate in the *Rajya Sabha* on the President's Address (8 January 1976) in *Selected Speeches and Writings of Indira Gandhi, 1972-1977* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1984) 241.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 251-252.

¹⁰⁴ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 501.

¹⁰⁵ 'Double Speak and Newspeak' *Satya Samachar*, No. 6 (12 August 1976) JP Papers, File No 15, NMML.

Emergency...India has become the land of unquestioned and unquestionable Orwellian double talk'.¹⁰⁶ Another claimed, 'If slogans were edible, India would be on the UN black list of overfed nations.'¹⁰⁷ Journalist, Emergency critic and Gandhi's cousin Nayantara Sahgal described 'a situation where no voice but her own could be heard now that debate and dissent had been silenced'.¹⁰⁸ Gandhi was not the regime's only spokesperson but her voice was dominant in the Emergency's script.

Close analysis of these dominant discourses is crucial for understanding Emergency politics. Although this dominance situates Gandhi's voice as critical, Guha's use of the term script also suggests an element of dialogue. Resistance was restricted but possible, particularly underground and abroad. Disrupting these dominant discourses and frustrating attempts to monopolise the right to speak were integral to the organised opposition's agenda. Leaders, political workers and parties involved in the JP-led movement for Total Revolution continued to protest, mostly within the *Lok Sangharsh Samiti* (LSS, People's Struggle Committee), after the imposition of Emergency. The Samiti, with Jana Sangh leader Nanaji Deshmuk as its General Secretary, brought together people from across the political spectrum, including leaders and workers from the Congress (O), Socialist Party, BLD, Jana Sangh and the newly banned Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) cadres.¹⁰⁹ Circulating underground literature was a critical LSS resistance strategy. Although necessarily restricted, these efforts were formalised in June 1976 with the first issue of the Samiti's regular news bulletin *Satya Samachar*. This recorded that 'the atmosphere of apprehension and mutual distrust is so pervasive. Mouths remain sealed though hearts may be sealed with anger and sorrow.'¹¹⁰ This bulletin and other opposition literature sought to

¹⁰⁶ 'Empress India' *Sydney Morning Herald* (1 September 1976) in *Satya Samachar* (29 September 1976) JP Papers, Subject Files No 315, NMML.

¹⁰⁷ John O Sullivan, 'British Criticism of Soft Line Taken by Politicians' *Swaraj* (18 September 1976) JP Papers, Subject Files No 318, NMML.

¹⁰⁸ Sahgal, *Tryst with Power*, 232.

¹⁰⁹ The CPI (M) and CPI (ML), another banned organisation, were also active in opposition to the Emergency although they did not formally fall under the LSS umbrella. This unity between anti-Emergency groups from across the political spectrum is one of the defining elements of the underground movement and the formation of the Janata Party that followed.

¹¹⁰ LSS, *Satya Samachar*, No. 1 (12 June 1976) JP Papers, Press Clippings File No. 15, NMML.

expose and counter Gandhi's discursive dominance. The Socialist Party's bulletin *Janata*, which ceased publication for long periods under the regime due to the censor's restrictions, reflected on the underground opposition's main objectives: 'one of its major tasks was to inform and enlighten the people on the ways and functioning of the government.'¹¹¹

A dossier of this literature, compiled by the underground information team and held in JP's private papers, reveals the nature of these communications and their importance in the anti-Emergency movement. This collection located censorship as the 'most crippling' facet of the regime: 'the country was swamped with propaganda'. With all legitimate avenues of news blocked, 'the underground newssheet became a lifeline'.¹¹² Even the first months of Emergency rule saw many 'disjointed individual efforts' at circulating material with the postscript 'read, reproduce and circulate'. Across the country, a network of communications developed and over 600 centres received the formal bulletin.¹¹³ It drew on word of mouth and several publications that resisted the censor or attempted to. The bulletin also featured reports from international media and from groups that condemned Gandhi's government's actions abroad, such as the US based Friends of India Society and the Free JP Campaign launched in the UK. The Emergency government's discourse was dominant but not entirely hegemonic and the organised opposition movement and its counter narratives found expression through these channels.

The next two chapters are broadly concerned with the Emergency's script and the importance of both gendered narratives and women within it. They speak to a focus on narratives that characterises some recent scholarship on this period, and particularly Maya Dodd's work on how the state of exception transformed modes of narrating the nation. This thesis relies extensively on discourse analysis to understand the Emergency's narratives.¹¹⁴ Sara Mills asserts that discourse 'can allow us to analyse similarities across a range of texts

¹¹¹ 'Emergency Atrocities: Let the People Know' *Janata*, XXXII.15 (8 May 1977) 5.

¹¹² 'The lifeline of information during the Emergency' Subject Files No. 315, JP papers, NMML, iv.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ For further discussion of discourse analysis as method, see Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, *Discourse Analysis: Investigating the Processes of Social Construction* (London: Sage, 2002).

as the products of a particular set of knowledge power relations',¹¹⁵ and this well-established method is particularly apt for investigating the historical construction of gendered national narratives. I demonstrate that Emergency discourses, while often shaped by iconographies of female leadership, did not emerge from a single source but from a range of texts that reflect the gendered construction of the regime's politics. In his study of imagined constructions of the Indian nation, Sudipta Kaviraj writes that 'politics is of course a world of words, but which words, which parts of the words and things made out of them are we trying to study in the analysis of discourse?'¹¹⁶ He underscores the importance of attending to the constraints that govern the articulation of discourses as well as the words that constitute them, and so my discussion foregrounds key contexts like the regime's restrictions on speech and its political imperatives. To assess how gender and women figure in these narrations, I turn to a range of pro and anti-Emergency texts; what Dodd describes as an 'archive of democracy'.¹¹⁷ These include speeches and writings by Gandhi and other prominent Emergency leaders, government pamphlets, party publications, media reports and underground literature. My discussion also traces the proliferation of these discourses across fiction and visual sources.

Whilst existing scholarship on the Emergency has rarely considered the intersections between its politics and gendered identities, fictional representations often explore this relationship. Tarlo describes this period's controversial and traumatic nature, for both individuals affected by its repressive measures and the nation at large, as 'uncomfortable ground for historical and political analysis' but 'fertile food for fiction'.¹¹⁸ Fiction writers 'have been keen to evoke and embellish the horror of such atrocities'.¹¹⁹ Literary depictions constitute a key element of the popular Emergency counter narrative

¹¹⁵ Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1997) 23.

¹¹⁶ Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 85.

¹¹⁷ Dodd, 'Archives of Democracy'.

¹¹⁸ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

and they are a crucial component of Dodd's 'archive of democracy'. This thesis's chapters examining the Emergency's political narratives draw on this fiction as source material.

There has been widespread recognition that no historical evidence is transparent, a recognition that has sometimes blurred the boundaries between historical fact and literary fiction. Roland Barthes challenged the distinction between historical and fictional discourses, questioning historiography's claims to objectivity.¹²⁰ Hayden White similarly foregrounded the narrative nature of history, arguing that 'the affiliation of narrative historiography with literature and myth should provide no reason for embarrassment'. Their shared systems of meaning production, he claimed, 'are distillates of the historical experience of a people, a group, a culture'.¹²¹ Although White's interventions often proved controversial and triggered defences of History's alleged empiricism, postmodernism and poststructuralist theories of discourse have undoubtedly shaken such reverence for facts and precipitated an acceptance that all narratives are stories in the sense that their authors shape them. All sources, whether fictional or documentary, contain an inevitable degree of subjectivity and partiality.

This broader questioning of objectivity and an expansion in the kinds of histories we narrate have encouraged the inclusion of stories within the discipline of History. Historians have become increasingly interested in stories from subject positions and locations that are harder to access from conventional archives: social history 'from below', feminist history, subaltern studies and histories of emotions all encourage attention to such sources.¹²² Developments in oral history, recognising the possibility of multiple versions of history depending on a subject's standpoint and seminal works such as Natalie Zemon Davies's *Fiction in the Archive*, have established storytelling and fiction as valid objects for historical

¹²⁰ Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History', trans. Stephen Bann *Comparative Criticism*, 3 (1981) 7-20.

¹²¹ Hayden White, 'The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory' *History and Theory*, 23.1 (1984) 20.

¹²² Sarah Maza's discussion, although confined to western examples, provides a useful summary of these trends in European historiography: 'Stories in History: Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History' *The American Historical Review*, 101.5 (1996) 1493-1515.

study, rather than obstacles to overcome in the search for an objective truth.¹²³ As a response to reality and repository of cultural and social meaning, fictions can yield insights into the daily life of a given historical period, particularly where a dearth of archival material exists. The launch of the journal *Literature and History* in the mid-1980s sought to cement the productive relationship between these disciplines and materials. Editors Paul Stagnant and Francis Duke declared their aim to position history in a more active role than mere context in literary fiction, and to see this fiction as a social entity, a vehicle for the production and reproduction of forms of consciousness that can be historically informative.¹²⁴

Such understandings have flourished in postcolonial writing and scholarship. The relations between historical and literary narratives have become fertile ground for articulating resistance, including anti-colonial sentiments, for asserting and exploring postcolonial national identities and for disrupting hegemonic narratives of the past. As Jerome de Groot argues in his work on the historical novel, postmodern writers have developed and deployed the indeterminacy of that relationship between history and fiction: 'the very insubstantiality inherent in our relation to "History" has provided them with the set of tools for challenging legitimating narratives and locating radical dissent'.¹²⁵ The historical novel and other creative arts have often been utilised to disrupt particular historical national narratives, to 'reinsert communities into the past', counter marginalisation and destabilise cultural hegemonies, particularly those of white, European, colonial making, through the intensely politicised process of 'writing back'.¹²⁶

Salman Rushdie underscores the capacity of fiction to act as such a tool for resistance. He describes the version of India set forth by Saleem Sinai, the narrator of his novel *Midnight's Children*, as 'a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds

¹²³ Natalie Zemon Davies, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

¹²⁴ Francis Duke and Paul Stagnant, 'When so much of it is invention: History in Literature' *Literature and History*, 1.1 (1985).

¹²⁵ Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2010) 112.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 139-150; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

of millions of possible versions' of the Indian nation.¹²⁷ As well as foregrounding the coexistence of multiple and conflicting versions of the nation's history, Rushdie claims:

Description itself is a political act...it is clear that redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it...Particularly at times when the state takes reality into its own hands, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicised...The novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth.¹²⁸

Such alternative realities are critical when the state constructs hegemonic narratives and constrains alternative expressions, for instance by enforcing censorship. This is a crucial starting point for Sunder Rajan's use of fictional representations to understand the gendered constructions of Gandhi's leadership. She examines 'the use of allegory as a strategic device of disguise, in this case made necessary by the contemporary pressures of censorship'.¹²⁹

Fictional texts often explore the state of exception in various contexts. Stephen Morton connects this with postcolonial writing's tendency to challenge the truth claims of colonial emergency narratives. Fiction yields insights into the legal and extra-legal nuances of colonial states of emergency, 'partly because of the ways in which the narrative structure, imagery and figurative language of such writing dramatised violent acts of insurgency'.¹³⁰ It can also be a means of representing the traumatic nature and effects of such states of exception, both on the nation at large and on individuals. Dominick LaCapra notes that 'not only the novel but the literary in general has been seen as a special site for assessing experience, especially affect or feeling',¹³¹ with the study of trauma high on the agenda of literary scholars. In her assessment of the relationship between trauma and literary studies, Elissa Marder similarly argues that 'literature is one of the ways we tell each other about

¹²⁷ Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands' in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds.) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006) 429.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 430.

¹²⁹ Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 111.

¹³⁰ Stephen Morton, *States of Emergency: Colonialism, Literature and Law* (Liverpool University Press, 2013) 19.

¹³¹ Dominick LaCapra, *History, Literature and Critical Theory* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013) 29.

aspects of human experience that cannot be contained by ordinary modes of understanding'.¹³²

In 1983, American literature scholar John Oliver Perry published an anthology of over 300 anti-Emergency poems. The published materials represent just a fraction of the poetry, translated into English from an array of regional languages, which Perry and Indian collaborators collected after he published a letter soliciting material in Indian newspapers in 1978.¹³³ Perry and journalist David Selbourne underscore the importance of these poems as sources of Emergency resistance for the reasons I outline. Perry notes that the poets featured believe that 'politics and poetry, private experience and public events, are intimately intertwined'.¹³⁴ The anthology stands as evidence of anti-Emergency sentiments, their articulation and their nature, contradicting claims that all citizens welcomed the regime and that intellectuals failed to criticise it. Selbourne describes these poems as an important counter to the suppression of official and judicial reports on the Emergency: 'History began, as always, to be re-written, so that the voices in the volume are historically necessary witnesses.'¹³⁵

These poems and other fictions are necessary historical sources for analyses of Emergency narratives. Several novels, including Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*, Arun Joshi's *The City and the River* and several of Meena Alexander's novels and poems, explore aspects of the Emergency experience.¹³⁶ Maya Dodd similarly emphasises the importance of fictional texts as historical witnesses, especially in light of the lack of subaltern testimony on the regime: 'acts of the imagination become sources to fill this gap'.¹³⁷ As fictional texts often explore

¹³² Elissa Marder, 'Trauma and Literary Studies: Some Enabling Questions' *Reading On*, 1.1 (2005) 3.

¹³³ John Oliver Perry (ed.) *Voices of Emergency: An All India Anthology of Protest Poetry of the 1975-1977 Emergency* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1983) xvi.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, xii.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, viii.

¹³⁶ For further discussion of some of these, see O.P. Mathur, *Indira Gandhi and the Emergency as Viewed by the Indian Novel* (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2004).

¹³⁷ Dodd, 'Archives of Democracy', 3.

gendered power relations and female characters' perspectives, they can also function as sources to fill the gap with which this thesis is concerned. Visual depictions of the Emergency, including cartoons and photographs, play a similar role, as these also often pictured women's engagements with the regime or utilised gendered iconographies to represent it.

Pictures are critical in the construction of national narratives. Historical photographs reflect and perpetuate power relations and often function as important sources in histories of colonial power and anti-colonial nationalisms. Research on colonialism and the camera has explored this relationship extensively. James R. Ryan, for instance, demonstrates the importance of photography in establishing the British Empire's imaginative geography.¹³⁸ Photographs can illuminate 'the politics of colonial perception and deterministic attempts to construct ethnicities and landscapes'.¹³⁹ Images can also resist the colonial gaze and have played important roles in the consolidation of anti-colonial sentiments and in narratives of postcolonial nations. Christopher Pinney's history of popular visual culture in India charts the connections between the production and consumption of religious images and the struggle against colonial rule.¹⁴⁰ Sumathi Ramaswamy also examines patriotic pictures in order to interrogate gendered visual and cartographic projections of the nation.¹⁴¹

Such visual iconographies were a crucial component of Emergency narratives. Banerjee highlights that the posters of Gandhi that proliferated in Delhi and the 'visual spectacles that marked the public space with images of Indira's supposed popularity...formed a large part of the combined propaganda machinery that kept the Emergency juggernaut rolling'.¹⁴² Photographs of prominent Emergency leaders, especially

¹³⁸ James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹³⁹ Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann, 'Photography, History and Memory' in Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann (eds.) *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998) 5.

¹⁴⁰ Christopher Pinney, *'Photos of the Gods': The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁴¹ Sumathi Ramaswamy, 'Maps/Mother Goddesses, and Martyrdom in Modern India' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 67.3 (2008) 819-853.

¹⁴² Banerjee, 'Political Iconography'.

Gandhi and Sanjay, and images visualising popular support for the regime within pro-Emergency propaganda, contributed to this machinery. Chapter three's discussion of women's support highlights their dominance within such images, culminating in a distinctly gendered visual representation of the Emergency's popularity.¹⁴³ Visual depictions were also central to the articulation of anti-Emergency narratives. Supurna Das Gupta insists that Emergency conditions 'provided the political cartoonist with the perfect opportunity to whet his appetite...and to destabilise through humour the very serious claims of stability that the state seemed to make'.¹⁴⁴ Such dissenting caricatures appeared in the mainstream media, international press and underground literature.¹⁴⁵ I utilise these and other cartoons in chapter two's discussion of gendered narratives and in chapter five's exploration of the Emergency in the home, particularly in a discussion of the role of the housewife in Emergency politics.

1.4 'An assault on the bodies of the poor': Emergency, women's bodies and the archive

'An assault on the bodies of the poor' is how Rebecca Jane Williams describes the Emergency's sterilisation programme and its entrenchment within discourses of economic development.¹⁴⁶ In this thesis's introduction, I observed how recent and innovative scholarship on the Emergency focuses on the regime's impositions on individuals' bodies and attempts to negotiate these. Clibbens, Williams and Tarlo all demonstrate that poor bodies were the primary targets and recipients of these measures but pay less attention to the gendered dimensions of these embodied Emergency experiences. The scholarship on

¹⁴³ I have also written specifically on these sources in a forthcoming chapter 'Putting women in the picture: The role of photography in mobilising support for the Indian Emergency, 1975-1977' in Aileen Blaney and Chinara Shah (eds.) *Photography in India: From Archives to Contemporary Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, Forthcoming 2017).

¹⁴⁴ Das Gupta, 'The Nation and its Discontents'.

¹⁴⁵ Cartoonist and journalist Abu Abraham, for instance, originally published his images in the *Indian Express* and later collected them in *The Games of Emergency: A Collection of Cartoons and Articles* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1977). Cartoons feature prominently in published collections of underground, anti-Emergency literature. See Markarand Desai (ed.) *The Smugglers of Truth: Selections from Satyavani* (New Delhi: The Friends of India International Society, 1978) and Basu, *Underground Literature*.

¹⁴⁶ Williams, 'Storming the Citadels of Poverty', 471.

the gendered nature of the nation that informs my approach foregrounds the role of the body. Sikata Banerjee observes that 'male and female bodies as well as societal ideas defining cultural interpretations of masculinities and femininities are potent metaphors for expressing the nation'.¹⁴⁷ Nira Yuval Davis similarly underscores that 'gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nation'.¹⁴⁸ Women often assume such roles, 'as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively'.¹⁴⁹ The politics of Emergency quite literally played out on citizens' bodies through its sterilisation programme, and the gendered body is critical in chapter four's assessment of this.

Tarlo's ethnographic method is perhaps best suited to examining the histories of such visceral and personal bodily experiences. Her conversations with Delhi residents capture emotional responses to the threats posed to people's bodies, and the nuances within those threats, in ways that appear less frequently in what she terms 'paper truths'. One factory worker told her that 'in those days they would take you to the camp, ask how many children you had, then ignore you and sterilise you anyway...so I didn't stir out of my house'.¹⁵⁰ When asked how his wife felt about receiving the operation without consenting during the Emergency, an ironmonger simply responded, 'how would anyone feel if someone tortured them?'¹⁵¹ It is difficult to trace evidence of such practices and their effects on people's emotional well-being in the archives. Tarlo's conversations are particularly critical for accessing subaltern perspectives. Such an approach was beyond the limitations of this study, but it is possible to trace the gendered implications of the Emergency's programme and its effects on women's bodies through the archived files of the Shah Commission of Inquiry.

¹⁴⁷ Banerjee, *'Make me a Man!'*, 2.

¹⁴⁸ Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 39.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁵⁰ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 154.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

Chapter four relies heavily on these files since extensive use of the Commission's three published reports within historiography has not facilitated a consideration of women's experiences. Government archives, particularly Commissions of Inquiry, are not neutral repositories of information. Ann Laura Stoler explores how colonial commissions 'reorganised knowledge, devising new ways of knowing while setting aside others. One implicit task was to reconstruct historical narratives, decreeing what past events were pertinent to current issues and how they should be framed'.¹⁵² Like other arms of government administration, these commissions were 'part of the tools of statecraft'.¹⁵³ The Janata government appointed this Commission, headed by Justice J.C. Shah, in May 1977 and it began its 'probe into the excesses committed during the Emergency' the following month.¹⁵⁴ The Commission appealed for complaints and for information about these excesses from government servants and members of the public. It issued questionnaires to government departments, examined files and communications between officials, accepted oral and written testimonies and held hearings to question individuals. It collected evidence on some of the most repressive aspects of the regime, including arrests, censorship, urban clearance, sterilisation programmes and abuses of authority. Justice Shah then set about the 'colossal' task of communicating the Commission's findings and the many cases it encountered to the public.¹⁵⁵ It produced two interim reports and one final publication in 1978.¹⁵⁶

Women barely feature in these published reports, which inevitably contain only a fraction of its material. The Commission relayed its general and state-wide findings on how the family planning programme operated under the Emergency in its final document.¹⁵⁷ The

¹⁵² Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009) 29.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵⁴ 'Shah Commission starts work' *Times of India* (5 June 1977).

¹⁵⁵ '50,000 cases before the Shah Commission' *Times of India* (21 August 1977).

¹⁵⁶ *Shah Commission of Inquiry: Interim Report I; Shah Commission of Inquiry: Interim Report II* (New Delhi: Government of India, 26 April 1978); *Shah Commission of Inquiry: Third and Final Report* (New Delhi: Government of India, 6 August 1978).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 153-207.

report summarised key decisions made within Central Government, focusing on its increasing preference for and acceptance of compulsion in the programme, demonstrated through ministerial correspondence. It also summarised state governments' individual responses to the Commission's questionnaire on this policy, which was gender blind. It did not ask about, and therefore states did not report, the number of men and women sterilised under the regime.¹⁵⁸ Its summary of the programme in Haryana, for instance, observed that 'a target of 52,000 sterilisations was assigned by the Central Government for Haryana for 1976-77'. It briefly described how state authorities increased this target several times, until 'even the target of 2 *lakhs* (hundred thousand) was exceeded in 1976-77 and the state achieved 2.22 *lakhs* operations which was more than four times the original target and was almost four times the achievement of the previous year'.¹⁵⁹ The Commission's concern here was primarily to underscore the excessive nature of the Emergency programme and it presented these figures in a way that constructs this dominant narrative of excess. Women's experiences, either statistically or qualitatively, were not part of the Commission's remit. This is equally evident in its limited depiction of women's experiences of preventive detention under the Emergency, discussed at length in chapter six.

This exclusion and the reliance on these sources in scholarship have contributed to the absence of women from it. Although the Commission did not actively solicit information about women's experiences, these can be read across some of the individual testimonies, state replies to questionnaires and investigators' notes that make up the extensive archived collection of the Commission's files, which is housed at the National Archives of India in Delhi and was recently opened to researchers. The opening of this collection has had a significant impact on scholarship on several aspects of the Emergency. As Williams highlights, the thousands of files collected during the Commission's inquiries 'help to make the writing of "unauthorized histories"...possible'.¹⁶⁰ It is difficult to see beyond the

¹⁵⁸ This information is available from other sources, such as the Government of India's *Family Welfare* yearbooks, which chapter four draws its data from.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁶⁰ Williams, 'Storming the Citadels of Poverty', 476.

Commission's remit – to explain, blame and compensate for the regime's measures – in the selective published reports, but access to these files allows us to begin to interrogate its own organisation of knowledge about the Emergency.

Recent historiography has drawn our attention to several ways in which aspects of the Commission's objectives and the limited picture provided by these reports have pervaded existing literature. Patrick Clibbens questions their focus on the implementation of the Emergency in Delhi and their insistence on the dominant role that Sanjay Gandhi played in this. Clibbens addresses this distortion through his detailed analysis of urban clearance programmes in Maharashtra, a state outside of Sanjay's area of influence.¹⁶¹ He draws on some of the Commission's own files to do so, since it collected extensive evidence on the implementation of these programmes from state governments across the country. The narrow scope of these reports is also a central facet of Williams's intervention. She argues that the Commission's limited conception of what constituted an 'excess' has prohibited historical assessments of the sterilisation programme's connection to the government's wider economic agendas. The Janata government formed this Inquiry primarily to investigate these excesses, reveal their roots, prevent them from recurring and compensate victims. It only reported on what it defined as an 'excess' that warranted exposure and compensation. Despite the Commission's insistence that it was a 'fact finding inquiry' with 'no authority to record a conviction of any person', its public reports demonstrate a preoccupation with presenting blame for the regime's excesses.¹⁶² What the Commission categorised as such and focused on in its written reports continued to be the focus of scholarship. In relation to family planning, the government's use of physical force, threats, death and illness due to botched operations, the sterilisation of ineligible people and the *misuse* of incentives and disincentives were the primary 'excesses' on which the Commission's publications proceeded.

¹⁶¹ Clibbens, 'The destiny of this city'.

¹⁶² Note, VI/11034/102/79 CS, SCI Files, Ministry of Home Affairs, NAI.

Williams highlights the inadequacy of such an approach for her work, since it leaves the wider entrenchment of family planning and population control within paradigms of development, economic improvement and poverty completely undisturbed and unquestioned. The Emergency and its sterilisation drive, contrary to recent political analyses of the regime, stand as an isolated aberration; an 'excess'. This is equally problematic for a gendered perspective or one that examines these measures in relation to women's bodies and health. It removes 1975-1977 from the larger historical contexts of gendered power relations and feminist activism surrounding family planning, population control and reproductive rights. Such a perspective cannot question the patriarchal norms or gendered biases that chapter four demonstrates were integral to the formation, articulation, implementation and reception of this policy. A narrow conception of excesses also fails to allow scope for the condemnation of many of the policy's problematic characteristics – its gendered biases, the reliance on quantitative targets, the system of incentives and disincentives, which often contained an inevitable degree of coercion.

The archived files, which I accessed during fieldwork, include original state responses to questionnaires, hearing transcripts, witness testimonies and government orders that did not make it into the Commission's write up. For instance, the report either excluded or only briefly mentioned several state government's inclusion of maternity leave within their catalogue of incentives and disincentives, yet the archived files demonstrate this practice and its common occurrence. Although women featured rarely in the Commission's proceedings, by combing the archived collections I found several examples of women's experiences that the Commission did not choose to highlight. The files allow us to read against the grain of the Shah Commission of Inquiry's own remit and find glimpses of women's encounters with this particular Emergency policy.

1.5 Towards a spatialised understanding of the Emergency

In a 1986 essay, Michel Foucault described History as the great obsession of the nineteenth century, but claimed that 'the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no

doubt a great deal more than with time'.¹⁶³ The so called 'spatial turn' in critical thought brought the concepts of space and place to the forefront of an array of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences and also led to a reconceptualisation of these concepts. Geographers and theorists of spatiality from other disciplines demonstrate that space is fluid, socially constructed and contested. As Edward Soja asserts, 'space itself may be primordially given, but the organisation and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation and experience'.¹⁶⁴ Space exists in both concrete and relational forms, which are influenced by social relations as much as physical environments. The organisation of space is inextricably connected to relations of power and exclusion. Marxist analyses, including Henri Lefebvre's influential *The Production of Space*, highlight the spatiality of capitalism through its production of geographically uneven development.¹⁶⁵ Michel Foucault's various works on disciplinary power theorise its functioning largely through the enclosure, control and organisation of spaces.¹⁶⁶ As a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, where people are located differentially depending on their position in social structures, space emerges as a critical concept for investigating the production of such social structures and the power relations that they engender.

Feminist engagements with these approaches to space foreground this production of power relations through socio-spatial structures.¹⁶⁷ The concept of location, both material and imagined, is central to much feminist scholarship. Feminist geographers illuminate the ways in which women's lives are spatially demarcated, and show that gendered identities 'are deeply implicated in the social production of space...and in the sets of regulations which

¹⁶³ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces' *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986) 23.

¹⁶⁴ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989) 79-80.

¹⁶⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992). For a detailed discussion of Lefebvre's work and other writings on space from the western Marxist tradition, see Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 50.

¹⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1963) (London: Penguin Books, 2012); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1975) (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

¹⁶⁷ See, for instance, Doreen Massey's influential *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

influence who should occupy which spaces and who should be excluded'.¹⁶⁸ Gendered identities are spatially contingent as well as socially and historically constructed, and the regulatory frameworks that Butler claims govern gendered performance include geographical location, local and regional contexts.¹⁶⁹ As well as providing insights into the construction of gendered identities and power relations, an emphasis on the fluid, unstable and contested nature of space and place provides a platform from which to assess locations of resistance. Concrete spatiality and the politics of location also open up spaces of struggle from which resistance, negotiations and counter-hegemonic practices and narratives can emerge.¹⁷⁰

Attention to the spatialised politics of the Emergency is pertinent to this study for two reasons. Firstly, because a reassessment of the spaces of Emergency politics is a critical way of locating women. As Aparna Basu notes in her historiographical survey of women's history in India, women are often marginalised within historical writing because this tends to focus on spheres of activity that they have historically been less involved in.¹⁷¹ Spaces where women's activism or experiences might be more easily located tend not to be the subject of historical work. Existing scholarship on the Emergency privileges narratives of key institutional spaces like parliament, the Prime Minister's residence, media and the courts. Although women were present in these spaces during the regime, men often dominated them and critically, women's voices appear infrequently in the paper trails available to construct their histories. The spatial and discursive division of society into public and private spheres, and the association of these spheres with men and women respectively, are critical concerns for feminist scholarship. Partha Chatterjee argues that the importance of the inner, spiritual domain, and women within this, in the nationalist project has often been 'completely missed in conventional histories in which the story of nationalism

¹⁶⁸ Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999) 11.

¹⁶⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 3.

¹⁷⁰ Michael Keith and Steve Pile, 'The Politics of Place' in Michael Keith and Steve Pile (eds.) *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1993) 6.

¹⁷¹ Aparna Basu, 'Women's History in India', 181.

begins with the contest for political power'.¹⁷² We need to look beyond the institutional spaces of the state in order to broaden our understanding of the Emergency regime and to locate women's engagements with it.

The Emergency histories presented in chapters five and six shift the focus away from conventional locations of politics to alternative spaces, namely the home and the prison. These chapters examine how the politics of Emergency and cultures of resistance manifested in these spaces. I draw on theoretical insights about the social construction of space in these discussions, foregrounding how the regime affected particular spaces and how the concrete and social spatialities of the places in question shaped women's engagements with it. Chapter five utilises insights from a large body of feminist scholarship on the gendered division between public and private spheres to demonstrate that the home and women's domestic roles were actually highly politicised. In chapter six, I draw on interventions from recent scholarship on carceral geography to explore women's experiences of preventive detention during the Emergency and their constructions of this space as a site of resistance. These chapters uncover aspects of women's experiences that existing literature has not considered. They also fundamentally alter our understandings about how the regime operated in these spaces.

Documentary evidence from media reports, government pamphlets and party publications gives an indication of how the home space and narratives of domesticity shaped and facilitated women's support for the State of Emergency. In order to access histories of women's resistance in these spaces, especially the home, I rely extensively on oral histories from my fieldwork in India. The method is critical for this thesis's endeavours because, as Alessandro Portelli highlights, oral history 'started out primarily because we wanted to listen to those who had gone unheard'.¹⁷³ Oral historians have also positioned it as a potentially empowering methodology, whereby the process of remembering and

¹⁷² Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 6.

¹⁷³ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997) 58.

reinterpreting the past might empower individuals and social groups.¹⁷⁴ This is underscored by its cooperative and dialogic nature. The historian is not the sole author of histories compiled through this method. The result is rather something that ‘the source and the historian do *together* at the moment of their encounter’.¹⁷⁵ An emphasis on such individual encounters means that oral history has been at the centre of assertions about the possibility of multiple truths and different interpretations of history depending upon location. It is therefore an important tool for my emphasis on the diversity of women’s Emergency experiences.

Early feminist celebrations of the method subscribed to an egalitarian view of oral history as a means of articulating unheard voices from various subject positions. They also praised its capacity to empower people and communities through a dialogic interview process, in which participants emerge as active agents in the construction of their own histories.¹⁷⁶ However, as Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai noted in their collection on women’s oral history published in the 1990s, ‘when examined through the lens of expanding feminist scholarship, women’s oral history revealed itself to be more problematic than we had imagined’.¹⁷⁷ Questions have been raised about its empowering nature because the interview is not usually an equal exchange: ‘narrators are typically not true partners in the process’ and their participation in the construction of their history usually ends when the interview closes.¹⁷⁸ Women’s oral histories share some of the broader challenges facing women’s history discussed earlier in this chapter, particularly regarding its potential to induce disingenuous claims to sisterhood and analyses that privilege gender as an analytical category at the expense of other factors. Another important tension, which Kumud

¹⁷⁴ Alastair Perks and Robert Thompson, ‘Introduction’ in Alastair Perks and Robert Thompson (eds.) *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1.

¹⁷⁵ Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 3.

¹⁷⁶ See Sherna Berger Gluck, ‘What’s so Special about Women? Women’s Oral History’ (1977) in David King Dunaway and William K. Baum (eds.) *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (London: Altamira Press, 1986) 215-230.

¹⁷⁷ Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, ‘Introduction’ in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds.) *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (London: Routledge, 1991) 1.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

Sharma raises in her exploration of whether oral history constitutes a feminist research method, is that although often articulating the experiences of those who have gone unheard, this still means privileging some select voices over others.¹⁷⁹

The oral historian's sample is rarely representative of a community. The women who shared their stories and reflections with me for this project constituted an unrepresentative sample. All of them adopted an explicitly anti-Emergency position. Pro-Emergency activities are easier to trace in documentary evidence amongst the plethora of propaganda, but because of the continuing controversies around this period, anti-Emergency sentiments are more easily expressed today. Issues of access, location and language further restricted my sample. The need to access archives in Delhi and Mumbai determined fieldwork locations and so I conducted interviews in these cities. As highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, this project's sample was largely restricted to English speaking, left wing, middle class, high caste, urban intellectuals or activists, many of whom are fairly prolific public figures.

The women's narratives collected for this research reflect very specific types of Emergency experiences that were no doubt shaped by their political affiliation, urban location, education and class and caste position as well as gender. Some women positioned their anti-Emergency stance or activities in terms of their broader gendered activism. Although Ranjana Kumari commented that women who participated in the underground movement were 'pushed aside' after the election in 1977, she insisted that gender was an important factor in her mobilisation and for others: 'some of them were very sensitive, especially young people. JP made a team of these people and we were part of that team, leaders of the group. They understood gender equality very well'.¹⁸⁰ Indu Agnihotri, Professor at the Centre for Women's Development Studies, also emphasised gender and women's issues when she described her participation in anti-Emergency activism as a JNU student. She said, 'for me the women's question was very much part of my involvement

¹⁷⁹ Kumud Sharma, *Memory Frames: Oral Narratives from the Women's Studies Family* (New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 2005).

¹⁸⁰ Ranjana Kumari, Interview with Author.

from day one. For me it was a question vis-à-vis all the political formations'.¹⁸¹ Most women foregrounded other factors, like class-consciousness or association with political groups, as well as gendered mobilisations in reflections on their Emergency activism. I also interviewed Professor Vasanthi Raman at the Centre for Women's Development studies. She described how among the groups she was associated with as a university teacher in Mumbai during Emergency, 'none of us thought of it in terms of being a women's issue. Even though many women were active, they did not see it as a women's issue. They were part of larger movements'.¹⁸²

These oral history narratives are isolated examples. However, as I emphasised in the introduction, this thesis does not aim to produce a history of the Emergency experience that is reflective of all women, as if women were a homogenous entity. Portelli notes that whilst some research uses interviews to make general abstractions from individual experiences to the larger social world, oral history 'combines the effort to reconstruct patterns and models with attention to concrete individual variations and transgressions'.¹⁸³ I aim to foreground the multiple, diverse ways in which particular individual or organised groups of women engaged with Emergency politics, and the isolated examples presented here do achieve this. One of the central facets of the oral history method remains its emphasis on qualitative methods and subjective, individual experiences.

The privileged and often public position of the women interviewed for this research pose interesting questions about whether these narratives speak to the method's aim of articulating 'unheard voices'. Ranjana Kumari's comments about women being 'pushed aside' after the Emergency is a useful place from which to probe this. There is no doubt that, as she insists, narratives of women's participation in the opposition movement remain largely unheard. However, Ranjana's position complicates the notion further. As a public figure, she heads an active organisation, regularly speaks publicly on women's rights and

¹⁸¹ Indu Agnihotri, Interview with Author (New Delhi: October 2014).

¹⁸² Vasanthi Raman, Interview with Author (New Delhi: October 2014).

¹⁸³ Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 25.

status and has given several interviews on her activism within the women's movement. It is difficult then, to classify her voice as strictly 'unheard' and this was the case for most of the women who shared their experiences with me.¹⁸⁴

Although the women who comprise this restricted sample are not unheard, the histories of their Emergency experiences and their accounts of this in particular spaces often are. Portelli asserts that 'in memory, time becomes place', whereby recollected pasts exist within both the space of the mind and through their associations with temporality and location.¹⁸⁵ Commenting on the way in which narrators often interweave depictions of their personal, communal and institutional experiences, he defines these categories of experience by their links to 'political and *spatial* referents' (my emphasis).¹⁸⁶ The spatial referents that recur across women's oral history narratives provide unique insights into the places in which the politics of Emergency manifested. Oral histories do not only articulate unheard voices or marginalised women's experiences. They facilitate investigations into the presence of Emergency measures and resistance to them in diverse spaces, which are often absent from the historical record.

The second reason that such a spatial approach is important for this study and for emerging perspectives on the regime is their capacity to illuminate local experiences and the regionalisation of Emergency politics. Historiography on this reveals the hegemony of temporal narratives; what Soja terms the 'subordination of space'.¹⁸⁷ Scholars mainly situate the regime within its historical contexts and analyse it in terms of the teleology of the Indian nation and democracy since independence. This historicist approach has been critical in revealing the Emergency as a culmination of a number of long-term trends and an intensification of various aspects of Indian politics, as opposed to a sudden aberration. This

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, 'True Grit' *India Today* (11 March 2011) <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/true-grit/1/132095.html> (accessed 4 April 2016); Alma Freeman, 'A Conversation with Indian Women's Rights Crusader Ranjana Kumari' The Asia Foundation (6 November 2013) <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2013/11/06/a-conversation-with-indian-womens-rights-crusader-ranjana-kumari/> (accessed 4 April 2016).

¹⁸⁵ Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 32.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸⁷ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 10-11.

thesis similarly historicises aspects of the regime. However, it also draws insights from the spatialisation of critical theory, and demonstrates that such perspectives are useful for understanding the distribution of Emergency power, resistance to it on the ground and women's engagements with these.

Regionalism has played an important role in Indian politics since independence and even before, with the formation of regional parties like the Akali Dal in Punjab and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu, and the dominance of national parties in particular states, such as the CPI (M) in West Bengal. This regionalisation flourished under Gandhi's leadership after the delinking of national parliamentary and state elections in 1971,¹⁸⁸ and accelerated particularly during the early 1980s throughout her final term as Prime Minister. Regional parties emerged as politically relevant in a far greater number of states and even national parties increasingly foregrounded regional sentiments in election campaigns.¹⁸⁹ Analysts have paid very little attention to the complexities of regional politics or regionally specific experiences during this period of national Emergency, except for sweeping assessments frequently made by commentators about the north/south divide in the 1977 election results.

Janata and its allies – Congress for Democracy, the Akali Dal and the CPI (M) – won 328 out of 542 seats in parliament in March 1977. The Congress won just 153 seats and Weiner notes that 'the margin of the victory in seats won by Janata Party candidates was often enormous. Mrs Gandhi lost her seats by some 50,000 votes'.¹⁹⁰ In terms of electoral patterns, the most striking and the one that featured prolifically in commentaries was the schism between results in the north and south. The Congress mapped the results onto the states:

¹⁸⁸ Paul R. Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 125.

¹⁸⁹ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, 143.

¹⁹⁰ Weiner, 'The 1977 Parliamentary Elections in India', 623.

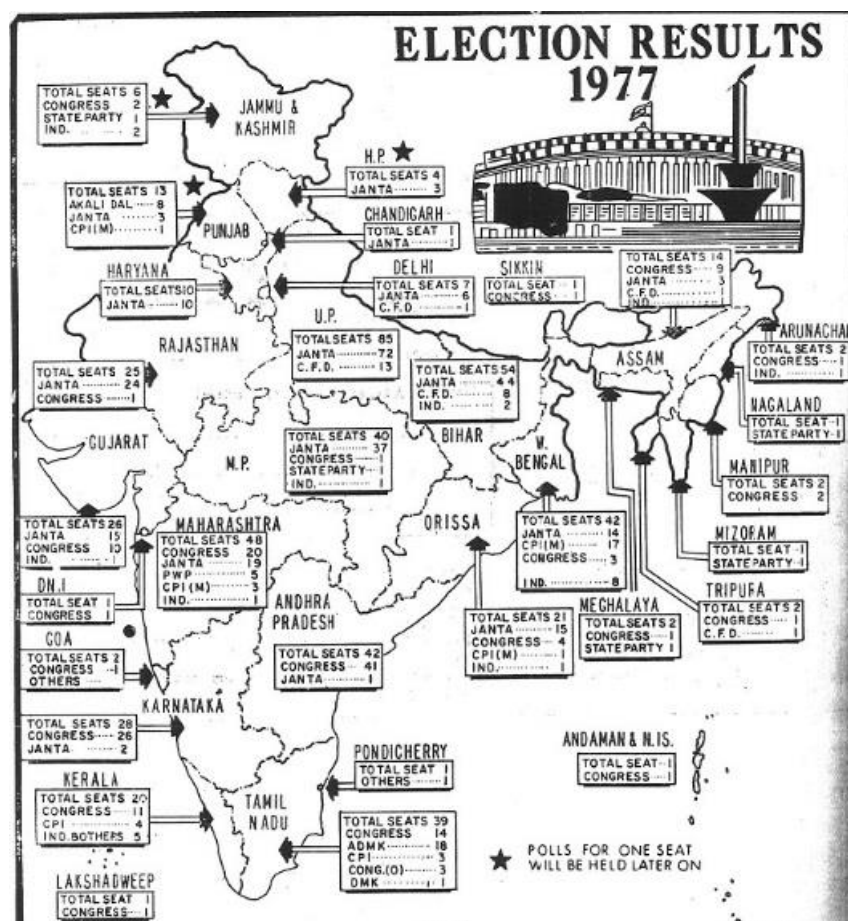


Figure 1.1: 'Election Results 1977'¹⁹¹

Janata won 72/85 seats in UP, 44/54 in Bihar, 6/7 in Delhi, 10/10 in Haryana and 24/25 in Rajasthan. The Congress defeat was particularly pronounced because these regions were its previous strongholds. In southern states, however, it fared much better and the picture was almost completely reversed. Gandhi's Congress took 26/28 seats in Karnataka, 41/42 in Andhra Pradesh and 11/20 in Kerala where Janata won none. It celebrated these victories in its election coverage, proclaiming that the Congress led United Front in Kerala had been able to withstand the 'Janata typhoon': 'this showed that people knew fully well who were their genuine well-wishers and could distinguish them from those who only made revolutionary speeches'.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ *Socialist India*, 14.17 (26 March 1977) 1.

¹⁹² 'Landslide Double Victory in Kerala' *Ibid.*, 26; 'Karnataka: Janata Routed' *Ibid.*, 31; 'Tamil Nadu: DMK Rejected' *Ibid.*, 32; 'Tremendous Victory for Congress in Andhra Pradesh' *Ibid.*, 25.

Criticism of the State of Emergency was crucial to the Janata Party's electoral campaign across the country. The regional divides in these results have led to the pervading perception that the Emergency and its most infamous measures, like urban clearance and sterilisation, only happened in the north of the country, or specifically in the Hindi belt. Commentators frequently explain the results in these areas by pointing to the overbearing actions and influence of Sanjay Gandhi and the unpopularity of the regime's coercive sterilisation agenda. *India Today* described one of the major developments during the election as 'the "Sanjay factor"' and cited the issue that caused 'the most harm' to the Congress: 'the unnecessary force used in pushing ahead the family planning programme...It has annoyed vast populations all over the Gangetic valley in Bihar, UP, Delhi, Haryana and Punjab'.¹⁹³ Weiner similarly observed the critical role these facets played in Janata's campaign: 'In northern India a primary target of the opposition was the sterilisation program that had been vigorously and in many areas forcibly pursued'.¹⁹⁴ These perceptions and observations pervade in existing scholarship. Maiorano's discussion of the Emergency's key consequences observes that 'the poor of the Hindi belt clearly understood that they would have been the first victims of an authoritarian regime'.¹⁹⁵ Ramachandra Guha also notes that 'the Janata surge had scarcely dented the south', which he views as evidence of regional divides as well as divisions along caste and religious lines.¹⁹⁶

However, Clibbens highlights the need to interrogate this further. He criticises the 'personality-centred' narrative put forward by the Shah Commission's published reports, which portray Sanjay as integral to these programmes and, as a result, focuses on their implementation exclusively in his spheres of influence within these northern states and around Delhi. Clibbens also questions the way in which 'scholars have simplistically mapped the Congress's defeat in north India and success in the south in the 1977 election

¹⁹³ 'General Election: Racing to a Photo Finish' *India Today* (16-31 March 1977) 8.

¹⁹⁴ Weiner, 'The 1977 Parliamentary Elections', 621.

¹⁹⁵ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, 31.

¹⁹⁶ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 525.

onto the urban clearance and family planning programmes'.¹⁹⁷ Clearly, there were differences in regional voting patterns, but the most commonly attributed explanation for this – that key Emergency policies did not take place or affect people in southern states – is easily challenged by Shah Commission of Inquiry's archived files. The Commission received complaints and collected vast quantities of data about the implementation of these programmes and their 'excesses' in states across the country. They were by no means confined to northern regions.

Clibbens demonstrates the over simplistic nature of this regional explanation by highlighting the presence of these measures in states outside of the Hindi belt where the Congress topped the polls.¹⁹⁸ Further, although the drastic decline of the Congress's share of *Lok Sabha* seats suggests a Janata wave, the decline in vote share remains present but far less dramatic. In its 1971 victory, the Congress won 43.7% of the popular vote, with the rest shared among a divided non-Congress opposition. In 1977, it won 34.5% of the popular vote and a far more united coalition of opposition groups shared the remaining votes. This loss is less dramatic than is often asserted in dominant narratives about the end of Emergency.¹⁹⁹ Neither Clibbens's study nor this thesis can fully explain these results, but they do suggest that a more nuanced understanding of the election, the alleged north/south schism and the regional politics of the Emergency is needed.

My use of evidence from the Shah Commission of Inquiry in chapter four tells a similar story, as I cite examples put before the Commission from various state files including western Maharashtra and southern Karnataka. Chapter six on the prison, as well as illuminating women's Emergency experiences in this particular institutional space, is also a regional history. It draws partly on oral history interviews and largely on a collection of personal letters sent to and from women detained in jails across Maharashtra, collected and archived by Dr Arun Limaye. Limaye, who Emergency authorities also detained, was a

¹⁹⁷ Patrick Clibbens, 'The Indian Emergency, 1975-177', PhD Thesis (University of Cambridge: October 2014) 200.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid; Clibbens, 'The destiny of this city'.

¹⁹⁹ Clibbens 'The Indian Emergency', 297-298.

prolific figure in gathering such materials on the regime. This was a crucial facet of the construction of the post-Emergency counter narrative. A published collection of underground literature details: 'In October 1977 some of those who were involved in producing underground literature got together in Calcutta to organise an exhibition of such literature produced in many parts of the country.' In April 1978, this material and more was displayed in a New Delhi exhibition organised by the Press Institute of India, which showed around 2,000 items in total. A souvenir booklet that published some of these items expressed thanks to those who collected this material, including journalists B.G. Verghese and Kuldip Nayar and Dr Arun Limaye.²⁰⁰ John Oliver Perry also cited a collection Marathi poetry collected by Limaye in his discussion of the regional anthologies that contributed to his project.²⁰¹

Limaye and his team gathered a vast collection of evidence spanning 15,000 pages.²⁰² This includes copies of prison correspondence; excerpts from government reports; underground literature; writings and speeches by journalists, academics and artists against the regime; letters and materials relating to the emergence of the Janata Party; letters written by JP; material from the international press; and letters from key leaders in the opposition movement.²⁰³ One section of the collection is devoted entirely to 'letters written by the female detainees of Maharashtra'. The collection's inventory reveals that these contain communications sent to and from mostly Socialist women, reflecting Limaye's own connections. They include correspondence from Marathi writer and scholar Durga Bhagwat, Socialist Party leaders Mrinal Gore and Pramila Dandavate, the CPI (ML)'s Sunder Navalkar and 'other female detainees' and *satyagrahis* letters'.²⁰⁴ The letters are

²⁰⁰ *The Pen in Revolt: Underground Literature During the Emergency*, <https://publicarchives.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/pen-in-revolt-9.pdf> (accessed 28 February 2015).

²⁰¹ Perry, *Voices of Emergency*, xxxii.

²⁰² This Limaye Papers (LP) are also available in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. See Guide to Contents, Reel 1, LP, 1.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2. '*Satyagrahi*' refers to a person who participates in a *satyagraha*, or non-violent resistance, campaign.

primarily in Marathi with a few in Hindi and they have been translated into English for this research project. Along with these letters, the Limaye Papers contain data about the number of women imprisoned across Maharashtra. An order from Mumbai's Home Department, addressed to Dr Limaye at Nandadeep hospital where he practised in April 1979, introduces this data, showing that he explicitly requested 'information about women detenues and *satyagrahis* arrested under the Defence of Internal Security Rules during the Emergency'.²⁰⁵

This data and these letters are a unique resource. They yield rich insights into women's experiences of preventive detention, their participation in opposition and their anti-Emergency sentiments in jails across Maharashtra. They allow for a detailed and unique assessment of women's experiences. Further, chapter six offers a reinterpretation of the prison space during the Emergency more broadly. Often viewed as a site of repression, my analysis of women's narratives shows that the prison also functioned as a site of community, relative physical freedom and politicised resistance. This chapter, with its focus on Maharashtra, also contributes to the debates on the regionalisation of Emergency politics and measures brought by Clibbens's work. This thesis draws upon a variety of methodological approaches, theoretical insights and sources in its analysis of the Emergency. It uses perspectives from women's history and gender history in order to examine the regime's gendered narratives, its impact on women's health, status and bodies, and its manifestation in diverse spaces. I document women's activities and experiences that are absent from historiography, but this thesis is also a transformative history of the Emergency, which argues that these reshape our understandings of the regime more broadly. The following chapter's exploration of its gendered narratives begins this intervention.

²⁰⁵ The note from the Home Department reads, 'Sir, I am directed to refer to your later dated 28 August 1978, on the subject mentioned above, and to forward herewith requisite information as desired.' Why Limaye specifically requested this information on women is not clear. Order No. 15A.2878/2274/SPL.4, Home Department (Special) Bombay to Dr Arun Limaye, 1195/1 Nandadeep, Fergusson College Road, Pune, LP, Reel 8.

Chapter Two: Narrating the Emergency

Ramachandra Guha's description of the Emergency as a 'script' begs a number of questions about the precise nature of the regime's dominant political narratives.¹ How was this script constructed at the level of language and imagery? How was it delivered or performed to the nation? If Gandhi and JP, or pro and anti-Emergency forces, were this script's joint authors, to what extent were their opposing narratives dialogic? This chapter explores these questions and argues that gendered identities were critical to the dominant narratives of both pro-Emergency propaganda and resistance to this. It begins by considering the gendered dimensions of Gandhi's political performance and leadership. The chapter then examines how gendered familial identities, particularly *Bharat Mata*, shaped Gandhi's and the Congress's justifications for the regime, and how opposition narratives sought to subvert these. The final section explores the use of the female body and femininity to represent the politics of Emergency. My analysis draws on an array of disparate materials that collectively constructed the official narrative of the regime and the post-Emergency counter narrative, including Gandhi's speeches and writings, government and party publications, national and international media reports, underground literature, cartoons and fiction.

2.1 Performing gendered politics and Indira Gandhi's leadership

Nayantara Sahgal claimed that the regime induced an 'atmosphere of bad theatre. Emergency perorations abounded in repetition and cliché'.² Slogans and rhetoric were critical to Gandhi's government's performance of its Emergency agenda to the nation. This played out through the flurry of radio broadcasts, media appearances, televised interviews, rallies, speeches, posters and leaflets that ensued. As highlighted in chapter one, performance is also a critical concept in theorising gender. Judith Butler argues that 'the

¹ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 497.

² Sahgal, *Tryst with Power*, 262.

substantive effect of gender is performatively produced',³ constituted by acts, gestures and language. It 'must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self'.⁴ To unpack the construction of the Emergency as gendered, this chapter examines the individual gestures, styles, language and acts that collectively constitute representations of it.

Butler's theory allows us to acknowledge the constructed nature of this gendered narrative. Femininities and masculinities are not innate but rather 'congeal over time to produce a natural sort of being'.⁵ Emergency politics were not inherently or inevitably gendered, but the regime was constructed in this manner by its protagonists. Butler claims, 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results'.⁶ These performances, however, remain 'compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence'⁷ and take place within 'a highly regulatory frame'.⁸ Gender is often constructed within heteronormative, binary frameworks of masculinity and femininity. This is true of the Emergency's gendered narratives, which frequently oscillated around stereotypical and polarised images of benevolent and malevolent femininity.

Other frameworks, such as the gendered constructions of the Indian nation discussed in the previous chapter, shaped and influenced the Emergency's narratives. Both the ruling Congress and opposition drew on gendered national iconographies, such as *Bharat Mata*, and frequently mobilised women's bodies as metaphors for the State of Emergency. We must also situate these narratives in the context of Gandhi's female governance. Theories of women's leadership in South Asia demonstrate the importance of gendered subject positions in women's accession to and exercise of political power in the

³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

region.⁹ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan foregrounds this in her discussion of Gandhi's career, highlighting that 'in the familial/dynastic aspects of identity that many third world women leaders have embraced, as daughters, wives/widows or mothers, gender is an inevitable component'.¹⁰ In Mark Thompson's analysis of female leadership over democratic transitions in Asia, he observes that 'gender stereotyping proved to be of a political advantage,' as women drew on the gendered iconographies of the nation in their politics. Many cast themselves as 'the "mothers" or "sisters" of a suffering nation. They promised to cleanse the soiled public realm with private, familial virtue'.¹¹

These family connections and gendered characteristics shaped Gandhi's leadership before June 1975. They were especially evident in the Congress Party's decision to appoint her as Prime Minister in 1966, which was a drastic promotion from her role as Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Many commentators agree that 'they believed that the selection of Nehru's daughter would please the electorate'.¹² Her place in this political family was an integral part of her appeal, but her position as Nehru's *daughter* rather than child was also significant. In her celebratory reflections on Gandhi's ten years in office, AICC General Secretary *Smt* Purabi Mukherjee remarked: 'When Indiraji became the Prime Minister, the then High Command of the party in their eagerness to retain power thought that, she being a woman, would make it very easy to control and manipulate her actions, while the real power would stay in their hands'.¹³ In his recent commentary on Gandhi's life and career, Sunil Khilnani similarly noted that 'given her gender and her vague ideological vision', senior Congress leaders chose Gandhi to replace Shastri because they 'expected her to defer to their ideas'.¹⁴

⁹ For example, Linda K. Richter, 'Exploring Theories of Female Leadership in South and South East Asia' *Pacific Affairs*, 63.4 (1990-1991) 524-540; Mark R. Thompson, 'Female Leadership of Democratic Transitions in Asia' *Pacific Affairs*, 75.4 (2002-2003) 535-555.

¹⁰ Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 110.

¹¹ Thompson, 'Female Leadership of Democratic Transitions', 538.

¹² Maya Majumdar, *Encyclopaedia of Gender Equality through Women Empowerment Vol III* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2005) 260.

¹³ Purabi Mukherjee, 'The Indira Gandhi Decade' *Socialist India*, 12.8 (24 January 1976) K14.

¹⁴ Sunil Khilnani, 'Indira Gandhi: The centre of everything' *Incarnations: India in 50 Lives*, BBC Radio4 (21 March 2016) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0741lv7> (accessed 5 May 2016)

Tariq Ali observes Gandhi's 'knack of using her maternal knowledge to good effect' throughout her career.¹⁵ This was another critical component of her political identity and public image and she wrote widely on her own experiences of motherhood with sons Sanjay and Rajiv. One collection of her speeches and writings published in early 1975 dedicated a section to her comments on family life and motherhood,¹⁶ highlighting her description of this role as 'a woman's highest fulfilment'.¹⁷ In November 1975, *Socialist India* published 'a little anthology of recent sayings and rare writings'¹⁸ and drew attention to this particular quotation and Gandhi's other public musings 'on motherhood'.¹⁹ After her selection as Prime Minister, the government explicitly positioned such comments in the national context of *Bharat Mata*. A 1968 pamphlet on her leadership included photographs of Gandhi alongside an image of revered nationalist poet Rabindranath Tagore's painting of this iconic figure.²⁰

Many comments about Gandhi's politics attest to a dominant image of her as inherently, and stereotypically, feminine. Her Principal Secretary reflected, 'far from being an iron lady, Indira Gandhi always remained basically an Indian woman...She was feminine not only in her personal grace but in her attitudes, reflexes and reactions'.²¹ Discussing Gandhi's 'intra-party manoeuvres' in a report for *The Guardian* in 1971, journalist Inder Malhotra wrote that 'she always retained the political initiative in her well-manicured hands'.²² Another article, whilst emphasising Gandhi's capacity for 'ruthless' action over national matters like war with Pakistan, remained focused on her feminine qualities with a statement about her hair care: 'whenever she appears in public she keeps her head covered – which, she says...protects her hair from the dust'.²³ These observations illustrate the difficulty that Sunder Rajan observes in reconciling gender and authority. Many of Gandhi's

¹⁵ Tariq Ali, *The Nehrus and the Gandhis: An Indian Dynasty* (London: Pan Books, 1985) 161.

¹⁶ *India: The Speeches and Reminiscences of Indira Gandhi* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975) 37-48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹⁸ *Socialist India*, 11.24 (15 November 1975) 9-29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

²⁰ *Indira Gandhi: The Prime Minister of India* (New Delhi: Government of India Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1968), 21.

²¹ P.C. Alexander, qtd. in Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 115.

²² Inder Malhotra, 'Mother India' *The Guardian*, 1971 in File JEGER/8/4, LSE Archives.

²³ John Grigg, 'Woman with the Heart of a King' *The Sunday Times* (7 March 1971).

commentators and biographers resolve this 'through the familiar dichotomising of the subject into the private self and the public persona'; whereby the self alone is gendered female and distinct from the political, public position.²⁴

The few limited analyses of Gandhi's gendered leadership that appear in existing literature explore this tension. Sunder Rajan examines 'the strategies of representation that certain texts of the culture resort to in their attempt to reconcile femaleness and authority'. This irreconcilability is, she argues, 'a crucial block to developing a theory and praxis of women's political power'.²⁵ Trina Nileena Banerjee similarly explores the 'ambivalent relationship of popular perceptions of femininity and masculinity to political authority'.²⁶ Both Sunder Rajan and Banerjee utilise the Emergency as a case in point in order to examine this relationship. I extend this discussion, arguing that an analysis of this relationship and the regime's gendered narratives also enhances our understandings of the politics of Emergency. These narratives do need to be placed in the context of cultural paradigms that shape perceptions of female authority. However, it is also critical to situate them within the very specific contexts of the Emergency, its restrictions on speech and its personalisation of politics into the figure of Indira Gandhi.

The regime's increasingly authoritarian governance and its centralisation of political power make the separation of the female leader into private self and public persona impossible and inappropriate. Its propaganda increasingly pivoted around the slogan 'Indira is India', which Congress Party President Dev Kant Barooah popularised during elections in 1971, positioning Gandhi as the nation's 'equal and visual embodiment'.²⁷ After the declaration of Emergency, this personalisation permeated Gandhi's public denunciations of the political opposition and her insistence on the need for stringent measures to protect the nation from these groups. Defending the imposition of Emergency in February 1976, she asserted that 'as a nation, India has often had to act in a manner not approved of by others.

²⁴ Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 116.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Banerjee, 'Political Iconography and the Female Political Leader'.

²⁷ Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 109.

As an individual also, my life and my discussions both public and private have often annoyed some section or other.'²⁸ The Congress Party also praised Gandhi and the regime on these terms. Its Women's Front's bulletin celebrated it as an 'aid to democracy' by connecting the Prime Minister and the nation's wellbeing, declaring 'long live Indira Gandhi! Long live India's glory.'²⁹ Women's Front leader Mukul Banerjee similarly claimed that since the declaration of Emergency, 'Indira Gandhi is every day adding a golden page in the history of India...She has revived the lost spirit of this nation. She is the living spirit of India'.³⁰ Such intense personalisation was a defining feature of this period. In its 1975 Annual Review, the British High Commission in Delhi reported to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that 'it is hard not to view Indian politics this year in terms of a highly personalised drama'.³¹ Its 1976 report also observed that 'Mrs Gandhi still sees Indira's fate as India's'.³² A piece in the *New York Times* aptly entitled 'India is as Indira does' described the proliferation of posters and billboards bearing Gandhi's image around Delhi's Connaught Place. It noted that these were 'only the most visual manifestations of a full blown personality cult carefully constructed around the Prime Minister'.³³

The feminine traits that Thompson highlights as politically advantageous to women leaders were also useful for articulating and defending the Emergency's increasingly authoritarian governance. Describing Gandhi's Emergency leadership as a rare example of a female-led dictatorship, Guha notes that 'as a woman autocrat she could use images and symbols denied to her male counterparts'.³⁴ The rest of this chapter offers a close analysis of these images and symbols, both in relation to Gandhi and in broader pro-Emergency rhetoric and propaganda. Judith Butler also argues that '*woman* itself is a term

²⁸ Indira Gandhi, 'Discipline in Democracy', inaugural address to the convention on disciplined democracy, Mumbai (February 1976) in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 258.

²⁹ 'Long live India's Glory' *WOTM*, 19.12 (December 1975) 2.

³⁰ Mukul Banerjee, 'Decades of Dynamic Development' *WOTM*, 20.2 (February 1976) 3-5.

³¹ 'India Annual Review 1975: Summary Report' FCO37/1720, NA.

³² 'India Annual Review 1976: Summary Report' FCO37/1932, NA.

³³ J. Anthony Lukacs, 'India is as Indira does' *New York Times Magazine* (4 April 1976) Subject Files No. 315, JP Papers, NMML.

³⁴ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 495.

in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end. As an on ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification'.³⁵ The construction of the Emergency as gendered was a constant process and pro-Emergency mobilisations of feminine roles and identities were not hegemonic. The organised opposition intervened in these narratives, offering alternative performances of femininity to undermine the regime. Banerjee alludes to this gendered dialogue between pro and anti-Emergency forces, arguing that images of the benevolent, nurturing mother figure 'gradually gave way to the emergent form of the terrible mother bent on the destruction of her own children' and 'an embodiment of all that was repugnant about femininity'.³⁶ Although Banerjee locates a shift in these gendered representations, this chapter demonstrates that competing narratives anchored in imagery and discourses of benevolent and malevolent femininity shaped the articulation of both pro and anti-Emergency politics for the regime's duration.

2.2 'It was the mother in her': Nurturing the national family

Specific mobilisations of the image of the mother/goddess *Bharat Mata* and a general emphasis on nurturing the nation were critical to Gandhi's Emergency rhetoric. *Bharat Mata* and the figure's associated qualities, including self-sacrifice, benevolence and devotion, have a prominent place in constructions of the Indian nation.³⁷ As 'the substantial embodiment of national territory – its inviolable essence, its shining beacon of hope and liberation – and as a powerful rallying symbol in its long hard struggle for independence', the figure of Mother India has become 'a focal point for many of the developing nation's contentious debates' about its identity.³⁸ This female figure is a crucial image in representations of the Indian nation. Sunder Rajan also acknowledges the capacity of such

³⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.

³⁶ Banerjee, 'Political Iconography and the Female Political Leader'.

³⁷ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 131; Suruchi Thapar-Björkert and Louise Ryan, 'Mother India/Mother Ireland: Comparative gendered dialogues of colonialism and nationalism in the early twentieth century' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 25.3 (2002) 301-313.

³⁸ Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010) 1-2.

gendered national symbols to temper the more controversial aspects of political leadership: 'Represented as the "mother", the woman leader is well able to reconcile aspects of nurturing and service in opposition to the authority of the father, as well as to subsume both parental figures into a single, complex authority figure.'³⁹

Gandhi consolidated this rhetoric in one address to the nation over AIR in which she justified Emergency measures. She explained, 'We felt that the country had developed a disease and if it is to be cured soon, it has to be given a dose of medicine, even if it is a bitter dose':

However dear a child may be, if the doctor has prescribed bitter pills for him, they have to be administered for his cure. The child may sometimes cry and we may have to say, 'take the medicine, otherwise you will not get cured.' So we give this bitter medicine to the nation...Now, when a child suffers, the mother suffers too. Thus we were not very pleased to take this step. But we saw it worked just as the dose of the doctor worked.⁴⁰

Establishing the nation as a sick child through medicalised language, Gandhi positioned herself as the mother nurturing her child back to health, mobilising this image to defend and explain the imposition of Emergency and its various 'bitter' measures. This depiction of the Prime Minister as a nurturing mother through medicalised imagery recurred frequently across the Congress Party's literature. In early July 1975, *Socialist India* welcomed Gandhi's ban on twenty-six 'anti-national' organisations because 'the sores these organisations have caused in the body politic and body social must be cauterized'.⁴¹ In an interview with the *Times of India* in the same month, she described her actions as necessary to stop the opposition, who she claimed intended 'to paralyse the government and indeed all national activity and thus walk to power over the body of the nation'.⁴²

³⁹ Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 109.

⁴⁰ 'PM speaks to the people on Emergency and economic programme' *Socialist India*, 11.24 (15 November 1975) 3.

⁴¹ 'The welcome ban' *Socialist India*, 11.6 (12 July 1975) 4.

⁴² 'A campaign of hate and calumny was unleashed against me – PM' *Socialist India*, 11.6 (12 July 1975) 8.

The Congress consistently cast the regime as a medical intervention that nurtured the nation and saved it from paralysis.⁴³ Its Women's Front reflected that 'stringent measures were taken just as bitter pills have to be administered to a patient in the interest of his health'.⁴⁴ The party's report on Gandhi's valedictory address at an AICC meeting in Gauhati, November 1976, emphasised her hope that 'the medicine of the Emergency would have its effect'.⁴⁵ Gandhi returned to this refrain in January 1977, when she announced her plans to relax Emergency measures and hold elections two months later. 'May I remind you' she stated in her broadcast to the nation, 'that the Emergency was proclaimed because the nation was far from normal. Now that it is being nursed back to health, we must ensure that there is no relapse.'⁴⁶

Women's Front leader Purabi Mukherjee's celebrations of the 'Indira Gandhi decade' in early 1976 described her as both 'ideal womanhood and ideal leader'.⁴⁷ Mukherjee mobilised motherhood to explain the declaration of Emergency, as she claimed Gandhi 'had to take decisive action. It was not for the personal power of the Prime Minister'. Rather, 'it was the mother in her who responded to the frantic appeal of the poor and toiling masses of India. It moved her to decisive action'.⁴⁸ A report in the *New York Times* recorded that 'when a Canadian journalist recently noted that many Indians were afraid of her [Gandhi] she replied, "I think it is funny that anybody should be afraid of me...I am such a meek and mild person"'.⁴⁹ Reporter J Anthony Lukacs quoted directly from Gandhi's response: 'What do you want for your child? No mother wants to harm the child. And there are times when you have to be strict with the child. He may have desires which, if you fulfil,

⁴³ In another interview with the *Sunday Times* Gandhi referred to the opposition's aim of 'paralysing the government', see *Socialist India*, 11.8 (26 July 1975) 18-19. President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed echoed this in his January 1976 address to the winter session of parliament, stating that 'groups and elements of widely different persuasions joined together to paralyse the country's economic and political life', see 'President's Address to Parliament', *Socialist India*, 12.6 (10 January 1976) 2-3.

⁴⁴ 'Defend democracy, eradicate poverty: PM's calls to the nation' *WOTM*, 19.7 (July 1975) 11. See also 'A bitter pill was needed to restore nation's health: PM' *WOTM*, 19.12 (December 1975) 3.

⁴⁵ *Socialist India*, 13.2 (27 November 1976) 4.

⁴⁶ Indira Gandhi, 'Seeking the nation's mandate' in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 302.

⁴⁷ Purabi Mukherjee, 'The Indira Gandhi Decade' *Socialist India*, 12.8 (January 1976) K14.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, K15.

⁴⁹ J Anthony Lukacs, 'India is as Indira does' *New York Times Magazine* (4 April 1976) Subject files No. 315 'The Lifeline of Information During Emergency', JP Papers, NMML.

they are harmful.’ Lukacs observed, ‘as she sees it, she is only behaving as any mother would’.⁵⁰ Gandhi positioned herself as a mother simply disciplining her child, utilising this rhetoric to refute accusations that her actions inspired fear.

Banerjee’s article on the iconographies of Gandhi’s rule foregrounds ‘the propaganda that painted her leadership as motherly service to the nation’, in which ‘the vast populace of India appeared as her children’.⁵¹ A familial figure and abstract emblem of the nation, *Bharat Mata* ‘was also the iconic embodiment of the twin feminine and seemingly opposing virtues of service/nurture and power/*Shakti*’.⁵² This servile quality was important, as Sunder Rajan argues: ‘the acceptable face of leadership is service. It denies power, stresses sacrifice, and positions the hierarchy of public duty and private affections to give primacy to the first.’⁵³ In the nationalist iconography of *Bharat Mata*, service and sacrifice emerge as typically feminine qualities and these tropes featured regularly in Gandhi’s Emergency rhetoric.

She inaugurated this in the declaration of Emergency, establishing her defence against the ‘false allegations’ circulating against her because ‘all my life has been in the service of our people’.⁵⁴ Gandhi returned to this emphasis on service and sacrifice as she announced elections in January 1977. She told the nation ‘your support, your affection, your trust enables me to serve India to the best of my ability’.⁵⁵ In a BBC interview, replying to a question about whether she feared election results, Gandhi insisted ‘I am never fearful, you see, because I do not do things for success or failure. I am not really concerned about praise or blame. I do what I have to do for the country. While I can do it I have to use every ounce of strength to strengthen the base of democracy so that it cannot be destroyed.’⁵⁶ At a rally at Ramlila Ground in Delhi, *Socialist India* highlighted that she ‘reminded the people that

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Banerjee, ‘Political Iconography and the Female Political Leader’.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 110.

⁵⁴ Gandhi, ‘On Proclamation of Emergency’, broadcast to the Nation over AIR (26 June 1975) in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 177.

⁵⁵ Gandhi, ‘Seeking the Nation’s Mandate’ in Ibid., 301.

⁵⁶ ‘I do what I have to do for the country’ *Socialist India*, 14.16 (19 March 1977) 4.

she had always considered the interest of the nation above herself'.⁵⁷ During the election campaign, the bulletin celebrated 'eleven years of her service...already she has devoted one sixth of her life to enabling us to survive as a growing nation'.⁵⁸ It was also with this rhetoric of servility that Gandhi bowed out, ending her speech following electoral defeat with the insistence that 'my aim has been to serve the people to the limit of my endurance. This I shall continue to do.'⁵⁹

Cartoons published by Abu Abraham, political cartoonist for the *Indian Express*, satirised Gandhi's own narratives and her carefully constructed servile and nurturing image. One cartoon published in November 1975 situated Abraham's regular characters in front of a television showing Gandhi's figure. He captioned this with the headline 'a bitter pill was needed to restore nation's health: PM'. Satirising the plethora of pro-Emergency propaganda and her claims about nursing the nation back to health, Abraham added, 'the production of sugar-coating has already exceeded the planned target'.⁶⁰ In a statement issued to the press and circulated in underground literature, writer V.S. Varkhedkar directly questioned Gandhi's *Bharat Mata* image. He claimed that the state:

is like a nurse employed to bring up the child. It is no use talking too much about the conveniences of the nurse. Nor any praise is due to her if she subdues the child to make him manageable. The child must grow. This is most important. Progress of a country is to be measured in terms of a man's growth as a man, his growing self-reliance and his attainments after his own genius.⁶¹

Varkhedkar's critique of the Emergency appears in direct dialogue with Gandhi's depiction of it as a bitter pill administered by a mother to her sick child. It remains framed by the same narratives that gender the nation as female and its citizenry as male.

Other gendered identities relating to the family also shaped both Gandhi's Emergency rhetoric and the opposition's critiques. Her position as Nehru's daughter propelled her to office and she mobilised this extensively to construct her defence over Raj

⁵⁷ 'PM at Ramlila Ground' *Socialist India*, 14.11 (12 February 1977) 17.

⁵⁸ 'On to the polls and to victory once again' *Socialist India*, 14.8 (22 January 1977) 10.

⁵⁹ Gandhi, 'The People's Verdict' Broadcast to the nation over AIR (22 March 1977) in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 304.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ V.S. Varkhedkar, 'Through the Eyes of a Writer' Subject Files No. 318, JP Papers, NMML.

Narain's allegations of electoral misconduct. 'It is wrong' she told the Allahabad High Court, 'to say that I do not believe in the fairness of the means in order to achieve a political end. On the contrary, because of the training that I got from Mahatma Gandhi and my father, I believe that the means are as important as the ends.'⁶² In November 1975, the Congress Women's Front's bulletin reported Gandhi's comments that 'democracy is a process. It is not a static situation...Mrs Gandhi said her party and her family fought for freedom in a larger sense of the word and she was fighting for it today. But in no time and in no place has freedom meant freedom to destroy democracy.'⁶³

Gandhi emphasised the long trajectory of her place in the national family in the declaration of Emergency rule. She described this declaration as a necessary response to the opposition's attacks on her and asserted, 'all manner of false allegations have been hurled at me. The Indian people have known me since my childhood'.⁶⁴ In response to allegations of corruption in an interview with the *Times of India* in July 1975, she defended herself on the grounds that 'those who know me have seen how simply my family and I live. I have given away my ancestral home and its extensive grounds'.⁶⁵ Gandhi deployed this image of innocent family and domestic life as inherently incompatible with allegations of personal or political corruption, responding similarly to another interviewer's suggestion that the Emergency constituted dictatorship: 'The word dictator has been flung at me for over a year. Indeed, even my father was called one.'⁶⁶

The rest of the party and other leaders also utilised this imagery. A piece in *Socialist India* in July 1975 defended the declaration on the grounds that weakening the Prime Ministership would be 'disastrous', because 'like her illustrious father, Indira Gandhi has

⁶² Election Petition No. 5, High Court of Allahabad, *Smt Indira Gandhi* (June 1975) Subject File No. 312 JP Papers, NMML.

⁶³ 'India and Emergency' *WOTM*, 19.11 (November 1975) 10.

⁶⁴ Gandhi, 'On Proclamation of Emergency' in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 177.

⁶⁵ Gandhi, 'Reasons for Emergency' from an interview with the *Times of India* (3 July 1975) in *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶⁶ Gandhi, 'Emergency was Inevitable' replies to questions of Norman Cousins, editor of the *Saturday Review*, New York (1 August 1975) in *Ibid.*, 192.

brought the office of the Prime Minister to a new plateau of power and prestige'.⁶⁷ Another article published the following month praised Gandhi's record and alleged lack of personal ambition because, 'like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi has high ambition for her country, and like him, she wants to be nearer history than office'.⁶⁸ An editorial later in the year insisted that 'the precious heritage left by Jawaharlal Nehru has not merely been preserved. It has been consolidated and enriched by his daughter'.⁶⁹ This 'valuable link', the party further noted, 'is the real secret to our success as a resurgent nation on the march'.⁷⁰ Even some sections of the opposition continued to revere Gandhi's familial position. Muthuvel Karunanidhi, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and leader of the state's ruling DMK, articulated hostility towards the regime and many of its measures at a public meeting in Madras on 6 July 1975. However, he insisted that the DMK 'are fully aware that Mrs Gandhi is the granddaughter of that doyen among freedom fighters Pandit Motilal Nehru, that she is the noble daughter of that defender of Indian democracy'. Even now, he stressed, 'we accord due regard to her on account of this illustrious ancestry'.⁷¹

Gandhi's many public and national addresses were critical in this familial performance of her Emergency leadership. Her oratory was renowned for being 'spiced up with common sense virtues'⁷² and she often deployed familial language to address the Indian people, calling upon 'my countrymen, brothers and sisters', for example, in an interview outlining the reasons for Emergency.⁷³ At a speech in Delhi just before elections in March 1977, she positioned herself as a 'sister of the people', insisting that 'I have come to you not as Prime Minister, but as your sister, as one of you'.⁷⁴ She also frequently rendered her addresses as personal conversations with the populace. The day after the

⁶⁷ Dr S.K. Ray, 'Why Indira Gandhi is indispensable' *Socialist India*, 11.7 (19 July 1975) 22.

⁶⁸ M. Chalapathi Rau, 'The record of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister' *Socialist India*, 11.11 (16 August 1975) 89.

⁶⁹ 'Nehru Heritage Enriched' *Socialist India*, 11.24 (15 November 1975) 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Muthuvel Karunanidhi, 'Voice of Tamil Nadu, Save Democracy' address at a public meeting, Madras (6 July 1975) Printed Material File No. 67JP Papers, NMML.

⁷² Ali, *The Nehrus and the Gandhis*, 161.

⁷³ Gandhi, 'Reasons for Emergency', interview in the *Times of India*, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 226.

⁷⁴ 'A Sister of the People and Sevika of the Country' *Socialist India*, 14.14 (5 March 1977) 3.

imposition of Emergency Gandhi stated over AIR, 'I had told you yesterday morning that I would soon announce some more economic measures. These will take a couple of days more. Today, there are a few other matters to discuss with you.'⁷⁵ She situated this as a discussion, rather than a one way political broadcast. In another national speech she insisted, 'I am not delivering any address today. I have come to meet you and have a heart to heart talk with you.'⁷⁶ The same rhetoric anchored Gandhi's election announcement, in which she stated, 'it is sometime since I last spoke to you on the radio. However, through my continuous travels in various parts of the country and through the groups and large number of individuals whom I meet in Delhi and elsewhere, I have continued to be in close touch with you all.'⁷⁷

Anti-Emergency forces frequently invoked Gandhi's position as Nehru's daughter in their denunciations of the regime. Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci prefaced an interview with Moraji Desai by describing India's democracy as 'killed, by the daughter of the man who created it'.⁷⁸ One issue of *Swaraj*, a bulletin published by the Free JP campaign in the UK, circulated an excerpt from a speech Nehru delivered in 1936 in which he stated, 'a government that suppresses the press...[and] imprisons people without trial' has 'ceased to have even a shadow of justification for its existence'. It attributed the quotation to 'Mrs Gandhi's father!'; the exclamation mark underscoring her actions as a perversion of the family relationship.⁷⁹ In a letter pleading with her to revoke the regime less than a month after the declaration, JP similarly invoked this relationship, as he asked 'please do not destroy the foundations that the Fathers of the Nation, including your own noble father, had

⁷⁵ Gandhi, 'Why Emergency?' Free rendering of a broadcast in Hindi over AIR, New Delhi (27 June 1975) in *Selected Speeches and Writings* 178.

⁷⁶ Gandhi, 'Rights, Duties and Tasks' Free rendering of a broadcast and telecast, New Delhi, in *Ibid.*, 226

⁷⁷ Gandhi, 'Seeking the Nation's Mandate' in *Ibid.*, 301.

⁷⁸ Moraji Desai interview with Oriana Fallaci, FCO95/1812, NA.

⁷⁹ Basu, *Underground Literature*, 73.

laid down'.⁸⁰ In another letter addressed 'to the people' a year later, he similarly lamented, 'it is a pity that the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru should speak like this'.⁸¹

These critiques, anchored in the idea that Gandhi's Emergency actions violated both her personal family lineage and the national family, proliferated from the figurehead of the opposition and through many other observations. In a letter to BLD Chairman Charan Singh on the first anniversary of the declaration of Emergency, Constituent Assembly member H.V. Kamath ended his tirade against the array of Emergency measures by asking 'has repression and detention ever brought about change of heart anywhere in the world? Daughter of Pandit Nehru who bears the name of Gandhi and swears by Gandhian values should have known better than anyone else'.⁸² An article in the *New York Times* praised Justice H.R. Khanna, the only one of five judges to dissent from a Supreme Court ruling that upheld the government's right to detain people without trial. This similarly concluded by positioning Gandhi as a 'stubborn woman' who 'for the last ten months, has behaved more in the manner of an Empress or a Vicerine than like the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru'.⁸³ Another piece circulated in *Swaraj* also formulated its critique from the contrast between father and daughter, insisting that 'whereas Jawaharlal Nehru managed to curb his autocratic instincts during the turbulent years in which he led India's struggle for independence, his daughter, Indira, did not grow up to share her father's acquired tastes for liberal democracy'.⁸⁴

The Nehru-Gandhi family, and particularly Gandhi's youngest son Sanjay, were integral to the opposition's rejections of Gandhi's depiction of the Emergency as a motherly service to the nation. With no former political experience, Sanjay gained prominence during this period as unofficial leader, extra constitutional authority and member of the Congress Party's Youth Congress. He developed a four (later five) point programme, which included

⁸⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁸¹ JP, 'Letter to the People', Patna (July 1976) Subject Files No. 319, JP Papers, NMML.

⁸² H.V. Kamath to Charan Singh (26 June 1976) Correspondence Files, H.V. Kamath Papers, NMML.

⁸³ 'Editorial: Fading Hopes of India' *New York Times* (30 April 1976).

⁸⁴ Angus Deming with Loren Jenkins, *Newsweek* (7 July 1975) in *Swaraj*, No. 10, undated in Basu, *Underground Literature*, 70.

drives to plant more trees, raise literacy rates, abolish dowry, beautify India's cities and increase family planning. This meant that Sanjay and Youth Congress cadres were heavily involved and associated with two of the regime's most repressive and controversial measures – urban clearance and coercive sterilisation.⁸⁵ He rivalled his mother in his media presence as the focus of 192 news items from AIR's Delhi station during this period.⁸⁶ His lack of official position and the heavy-handed nature of these policies gave rise to the popular perception that his influence was dangerous and unchecked. In many observations about the Emergency experience, particularly in underground literature, Sanjay emerges as the ultimate villain.

One issue of *Satya Samachar* described him as 'the best friend of the opposition in Mrs Gandhi's camp', for his numerous controversial actions and particularly his tendency to treat the poor as 'worms and insects who can be uprooted from their jobs and homes' on a whim.⁸⁷ Frustrations about the prominence of his five-point programme were also apparent. *Satya Samachar* described this as a 'diversionary tactic' and lamented that 'with the passing of time it is becoming more and more clear that the four or five points of Mr Sanjay Gandhi are being given more import than the twenty points of Mrs Gandhi'.⁸⁸ This, the opposition insisted, was 'not without design', suggesting that the government used this as a diversion, so that instead of 'land reform, family planning and tree planting are being given precedence'.⁸⁹

Concerns that Sanjay's position signalled an attempt to cement dynastic rule fuelled fears about the danger that the Emergency posed to India's democracy. Another report published in *Swaraj* named Sanjay the 'heir apparent' and underscored his lack of political experience, emphasising that until the Emergency, he 'was known to the Indian public

⁸⁵ For a more detailed discussion of Sanjay's life and role during this period, see Mehta, *The Sanjay Story*.

⁸⁶ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 510

⁸⁷ 'Flame of Liberty Burning Bright' *Satya Samachar* (12 August 1976) Press Clippings File No. 15, JP Papers, NMML.

⁸⁸ 'Family Planning: A Diversionary Tactic' *Satya Samachar*, Vol 7-8 (26 September 1976) Press Clippings File No. 15, JP Papers, NMML.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

chiefly for his youthful pranks, his stunning ex-model wife and his attempts to mass produce a “people’s car”.”⁹⁰ This report further noted that now, ‘he is being groomed as his mother’s heir apparent and creating front page news as he barnstorms India shouting her post-Emergency policies’.⁹¹ The juxtaposition of his inexperience and his sudden rise to power as part of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty was a consistent refrain. Another report from February 1976 noted, ‘the person who has benefitted most due to the Emergency is the dictator’s heir Sanjay’, insisting that ‘even if we ignore Sanjay’s past deeds, his public image that forms now is humorous’. Undermining him and highlighting his ineptitude was a key opposition tactic. This article further reported, ‘people were heard laughing and saying during his public meetings that he is made of wax. When in a meeting he tried to hide his lack of knowledge and inability to orate and said he believes in deeds, not words.’⁹²

Many observers view Sanjay as a central reason for the regime’s collapse. In an article published just before the March 1977 elections, Chief Foreign Correspondent for the *Daily Mail* Dermot Purgavie described Sanjay as ‘this rude, arrogant son who could bring down the world’s most powerful woman’.⁹³ Writing on Gandhi’s defeat he observed, ‘Sanjay’s emergence as a close advisor to his mother was an important campaign issue’.⁹⁴ That Sanjay, rather than Indira, was responsible for some of the worst of the Emergency’s excesses and for the Congress’s electoral defeat was, and continues to be, a dominant and popular perception. Rohinton Mistry’s novel *A Fine Balance* depicts the impact of Sanjay’s actions on his mother’s position in an incident where he metaphorically topples her regime. At a Congress rally, Sanjay flies over his mother and a cardboard cut-out of her image on stage, showering pamphlets on his five-point programme over the audience. Mistry depicts the wind caused by Sanjay’s helicopter as quite literally destructive:

⁹⁰ Kenneth Labich and Edward Behr, ‘India’s Heir Apparent’ *Newsweek* (16 February 1976) in *Swaraj*, No. 19 in Basu, *Underground Literature*, 77.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² ‘Sanjay Gandhi’s Emergence – A Conspiracy to Establish Dynasty’ *The Voice* (23 February 1976) in Basu, *Underground Literature*, 82.

⁹³ Dermot Purgavie, *Daily Mail* (16 March 1977) 6.

⁹⁴ Dermot Purgavie, ‘Humbling of the Most Powerful Woman in the World’ *Daily Mail* (21 March 1977) 4.

The Prime Minister's eighty-foot cut out began to sway in the tempest of the helicopter's blades. The crowd shouted in alarm. The figure with outstretched arms groaned, and the ropes strained at the moorings...the whirlwind was much too strong to withstand. The cut out started to topple slowly, face forward. Those within the vicinity of the cardboard-and-plywood giant ran for their lives.⁹⁵

As noted in the previous chapter, Clibbens argues that such familial interpretations, which also shaped the Shah Commission of Inquiry's parameters, cannot explain several aspects of the regime.⁹⁶ They do, however, demonstrate that images of and ideas about motherhood dominated narratives of the Emergency, both during and after it. Emma Tarlo's study reveals that many people situate Sanjay as a 'villainous thug'. Tarlo found the relationship between such negative reflections on Sanjay and more positive accounts of Indira's actions puzzling. She observed, 'that this was an area of tension in people's narratives was apparent in the fact that it was the only area in which any criticism of Indira Gandhi ever surfaced. Her only fault, according to such readings, was her inability to control her son.'⁹⁷ Another common interpretation of their relationship, Tarlo found, 'was the image of her sacrificing her son for the nation'.⁹⁸ Both of these interpretations reduce Gandhi's politics to a mother's actions. Sunder Rajan argues that in instances where women's leadership straddles the public and private selves, 'the private traits...may be seen as irresistibly intruding on public behaviour' and 'the feminine traits, such as maternal fondness and irrationality...are made responsible for the weaknesses in official functioning'.⁹⁹ She sees this as symptomatic of the misogynistic failure to reconcile femininity and authority, but this was also an inversion of Gandhi's own carefully crafted public image and a critical feature of the opposition's interventions in her gendered pro-Emergency narratives.

Satyavani, a news service organised by the Friends of India Society International, regularly featured images depicting similar narratives. LSS and BJP members Markarand Desai and Subramanian Swamy facilitated this new service, which they intended to act as

⁹⁵ Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 263.

⁹⁶ Clibbens, 'The destiny of this city'.

⁹⁷ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 216.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 116.

the 'international arm of the struggle for democracy'. After being 'smuggled abroad', they established the society and its mission to assist the underground resistance movement at an international conference held in London in April 1976. Drawing primarily from international news, the Society produced its bulletin and circulated it to LSS centres in India as part of the network of underground information.¹⁰⁰ It regularly featured cartoons from a variety of sources that visualised the opposition's gendered narratives. *Satyavani's* 26 February 1977 issue featured figure 2.1, an image by the *Washington Post's* political cartoonist Herbert Block, depicting Gandhi addressing a large crowd from an elevated podium, foregrounding the dominance of her oratory. This visualised the regime's aggression through a representation of hyper-masculinised violence, distinctly at odds with Gandhi's feminine imagery.



Figure 2.1: Herbert Block Cartoon, *Satyavani*, 26 February 1977 ¹⁰¹

Rather than the devotion of a mother's children, the cartoon depicts fear in the eyes of Gandhi's listeners who are at the mercy of her supporters. This image personified the regime through the broad bodies and raging faces of these men, a distinctly masculine

¹⁰⁰ Markarand Desai, 'Introduction, *Satyavani* - the truth about all those lies' in Desai, *The Smugglers of Truth*, 7-8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

picture of aggression. The cartoon further inverts Gandhi's gendered discourses in its critique of the regime's dynastic elements, as the Congress *goondas* (thugs) boast badges that read 'Indira for Queen, Son Sanjay for Crown Prince'.

Criticism of Gandhi's projection of herself at the centre of this national family often shaped visual depictions of the Emergency.



Figure 2.2: Cartoon from the *Washington Post*, *Satyavani*, 12 October 1976¹⁰²

Figure 2.2 draws on a fable of monstrous female vanity by invoking the fairy-tale story Snow White, with the caption 'who's the fairest of them all?'. Inverting Gandhi's discourse of benevolent mothering, it pictures her Emergency leadership in the iconic role of the evil, murderous stepmother, as an aberration in the national family. This malevolence is underscored by the presence of the dead body labelled 'civil liberties' and the club which Gandhi holds proudly as she gazes into the mirror. These cartoons depict the Emergency's violence in distinctly gendered characterisations. The Snow White theme proved a popular one and occurred in another cartoon shown in figure 2.3, originally published in the *Herald Tribune* in September 1975.

¹⁰² Ibid., 39.



Figure 2.3: Cartoon from the *Herald Tribune*, September 1975¹⁰³

This image denies any association with benevolent motherhood and invokes the fairy tale's association with witchcraft, as the poisonous, potion infused apple represents the Emergency. These uses of the fairy-tale to criticise Gandhi raise some interesting questions about gendered leadership. The question that the latter cartoon poses, 'who were you expecting – Snow White?', suggests that as female leader, Gandhi may only inhabit one of two binary gendered identities – the benevolent princess or conniving stepmother/witch.

These tropes and an inversion of Gandhi's *Bharat Mata* image were central to Salman Rushdie's critiques of the regime in his novel *Midnight's Children*. Protagonist and narrator Saleem Sinai explicitly writes back against the kinds of forgetting or marginalising of the Emergency that Tarlo encountered in citizens' narratives of Gandhi's motherhood. Published in 1981, Saleem writes reflectively in the aftermath of the regime and is well aware that 'we are already forgetting', with newspapers talking of Gandhi's 'political rebirth'.¹⁰⁴ In the wake of the Janata government's collapse and Gandhi's re-election as Prime Minister in 1980, Saleem preserves his memories of the nation, culminating in the Emergency, into chapters in the pickling factory: 'thirty jars...waiting to be unleashed on the amnesiac nation'.¹⁰⁵ One of the ways Rushdie's novel challenges the official version of the State of Emergency is through an inversion of its gendered narratives. The novel depicts

¹⁰³ Basu, *Underground Literature*, 204.

¹⁰⁴ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Pan Books, 1981) 355.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 460.

Gandhi as 'The Widow', foregrounding gendered images in its demonisation of the regime's leader.

The first significant appearance of The Widow occurs in Saleem's fevered dream, in which the demonic green and black character viciously hunts down the children of midnight, all those born at the moment of independence with magical powers. Far from being an image or atmosphere of law and order, which Gandhi claimed her imposition of Emergency brought, The Widow's rampage in this scene causes utter chaos. The lack of punctuation in these paragraphs and the rhythmic, almost hypnotic, repetition create a sense of disorder: 'no colours except green and black the walls are green the sky is black'. The chase and the prose's rhythm culminate as the children are 'torn in two in Widow's hands...rolling rolling halves of children'.¹⁰⁶ This powerful early impression of The Widow in the novel represents a subversion of the Emergency's official rhetoric of law and order. This scene and Saleem's revelation about The Widow's ultimate plan, 'the smashing, the pulverising, the irreversible discombobulation of the children of midnight', explicitly reject Gandhi's projection of herself and her Emergency leadership as motherly, nurturing and servile.¹⁰⁷ 'Yes Padma', he tells his companion and listener, 'Mother Indira really had it in for me'.¹⁰⁸ Rushdie further undermines some of the cultural value associated with motherhood that Gandhi's political image and pro-Emergency propaganda relied so heavily upon by emphasising the fragility of the role. A vast number of female characters occupy the position of Saleem's mother and the question of his parentage remains open. Through this multiplicity of mothers, Saleem displaces the traditional power structure of the mother-child relationship that Gandhi drew extensively on, whilst also rejecting the regime's attempts to control fertility through its sterilisation programme:

Child of an unknown union. I have had more mothers than most mothers have had children; giving birth to parents has been one of my stranger talents – a form of reverse fertility beyond the control of contraception, and even The Widow herself.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 208.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 477.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 421.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 243.

The importance of these gendered, familial subject positions to Gandhi's public and political identity is evident in her reaction to Rushdie's novel. She launched a legal case against both writer and publisher 'claiming to have been defamed by one single sentence'.¹¹⁰ Rushdie repeats the sentence in an introduction to a later edition of the text: 'It has often been said that Mrs Gandhi's younger son Sanjay accused his mother of being responsible, through neglect, of his father's death, and that gave him an unshakeable hold over her, so that she became incapable of denying him anything.'¹¹¹ Rushdie underscores the absurdity of Gandhi taking issue with this single sentence out of a novel that unapologetically and consistently demonises her for many Emergency measures and the violations of human rights that these engendered, especially its sterilisation programme. It suggests the particular importance of these relationships and the identities of mother, wife and widow to her public and political image.

These tropes feature frequently across the resistance poetry collected by John Oliver Perry, which includes 'First a Shock' by poet and folklorist Ved Vatak. Originally circulated in July 1975, the poem underscores the perversion in the national family brought by Gandhi's imposition of Emergency: 'Roll back/ Dear Madam/ Roll Back the time/ I want to see/ If these things are/ The kinds of things/ Your father fought for'.¹¹² Vatak drew on other gendered identities as well as Gandhi's position in the national family, including the often-repeated assertion that she compared herself to Joan of Arc as a child:

She conceived of herself
As Joan of Arc
But instead of being burned
HERSELF
On the cross
She buried Mother India
ALIVE
While her gangsters
Beat the drums
In her praise¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981) (London: The Folio Society, 2013) xiv.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ved Vatak, 'First a Shock', 3.1-3.8 in Perry, *Voices of Emergency*, 74.

¹¹³ Ibid., 4.1-4.10.

The poem directly inverts the Emergency's rhetoric of heroic femininity and sacrifice, by juxtaposing Joan of Arc's martyrdom with Gandhi's assault on the nation. Refusing the connections between the female leader and *Bharat Mata*, the poem instead utilises this imagery to articulate the damaging nature of Gandhi's actions.

Several other poems offer similar narratives. One opens, 'the lady/ we are told/ When a child, in fervour, she burnt to ashes, her darling fancy doll/ for the sake of the motherland'.¹¹⁴ Like Vatuk's Joan of Arc reference, this invokes a well-known moment in Gandhi's childhood, where she set fire to her western made doll in solidarity with the nationalist cause and Mahatma Gandhi's movement. Foregrounding personal memories and childhood experiences as an explanation for her recent political actions, the poem continues, 'now grown up, wilfully, she is burning to ashes, the motherland/ for the sake of her darling "living doll!"'¹¹⁵ The poem underscores Gandhi's position as harmful rather than nurturing mother through its violent depiction of the Emergency's impact on the motherland, and suggests that Gandhi's actions are a result of her affection for her son, her 'living doll'.

Malayam poet and scholar K. Ayyappa Paniker's piece speaks particularly to Gandhi's medicalised depiction of the Emergency as a bitter pill and criticises the regime's sterilisation programme. Its title 'Gall Nut' refers to an ingredient in Ayurvedic medicine used to control male potency for family planning. The poem's speaker cries out about the physical damage the Emergency's gallnut has wreaked upon his body: 'my hands have grown long, my feet are swollen/ My ears are shrivelled, eyes dimmed, cheeks blown.'¹¹⁶ As in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the regime causes harm rather than cures. The identity of motherhood is inextricably connected with Paniker's representation, as the speaker addresses the figure forcing the medicine on him as 'mummy': 'O mummy,/ Bite me not and beat me not, O hurt me not so hard,/ I'll gulp this gall nut of yours'.¹¹⁷ An element of the monstrous imbues this depiction as the speaker refuses to acquiesce entirely, exclaiming, 'when the kitchen is

¹¹⁴ Ismail, 'The Lady', 1.1-1.9, trans. from Telegu by Vazir Rahman, in *Ibid.*, 115.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.12-1.17.

¹¹⁶ K. Ayyappa Paniker 'Gall Nut', 4.1-4.2, trans. from Malayam by the poet, in *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.6-5.8.

silent, and the bedroom quiet/ Then you, you hag, your gall nut brew/ Becomes a stain on my tongue'.¹¹⁸ The juxtaposition of his initial pleading with 'mummy' to do no harm with his outburst at the 'hag' is striking, and it is with this assertion and refusal to comply that the poem ends: 'But when at last I'm filled with this gall,/ Oh I'll put a little noose around your head, O mummy dear'.¹¹⁹

2.3 Femininity, the female body and representing the Emergency

These mobilisations of gendered narratives to articulate the Emergency cannot be removed from their religious iconography. Banerjee emphasises the influence of Hindu religious imagery in popular representations of national political leadership in India, which survived from the days of the nationalist struggle into the 1970s.¹²⁰ Such religious iconographies are evident in the mother/goddess figure and inversions of this that appear in discourses that either deified or demonised Gandhi and the regime. In both pro and anti-Emergency narratives, 'a strong undertone of religiosity and the sense of a mystical, yet terrifying, female power surrounded the popular perception of Indira Gandhi's rule'.¹²¹ Hindu Goddesses Sita, Lakshmi and Durga, Banerjee highlights, 'stood for the virtues of chastity, purity, service, prosperity and strength'; all qualities which Gandhi's Emergency discourses drew heavily on.¹²² In her explorations of the intersections between the figures of mother and goddess in visual depictions of *Bharat Mata*, Sumathi Ramaswamy underscores the physicality of this female figure, her body and limbs frequently mapped onto cartographic depictions of the nation.¹²³

Maqbool Fida Hussain's triptych of paintings, produced to represent this period of political turmoil, exemplify the way in which pro-Emergency literature depicted the regime and these qualities through the abstract figure of the mother/goddess and the physical figure

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 3.1-3.3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 6.1-6.2.

¹²⁰ Banerjee, 'Political Iconography and the Female Political Leader'.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ramaswamy, 'Maps/Mother Goddesses'.

of the female body. The Congress and government gave extensive coverage to Hussain's presentation of the triptych to the Prime Minister on 24 July 1975, dedicating a DAVP published booklet to it.¹²⁴ *Socialist India* reported that Hussain produced the three large paintings, which he titled by date alone, 'in a fever of creativity', drawing extensively on 'folk symbols suffused with Indian mythology'.¹²⁵ Titled 'June 12th 1975', the first of these images represents India on the day of the Allahabad High Court's ruling. In this image, 'Janaki (Sita, daughter of the earth) is the target of accusing fingers'.¹²⁶ Congress leader Jag Mohan explained the significance of the date and visual depiction: 'that is an important date in our national history...The mass hysteria that was whipped up by the opposition parties is superbly rendered into an unforgettable image of a headless body with a menacing stance, with four accusing fingers'.¹²⁷ Like so much of Gandhi's own rhetoric, this juxtaposed her femininity and position as daughter of the nation with an aggressive and violent opposition. In one corner of this painting, 'Janaki is seated on a huge palm', the victim of pointing fingers. Mohan explained: 'Hussain has effectively used the Janaki myth and legend as an effective parallel to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who became the target of accusing fingers from a mindless mob on June 12th. Hence the headless torso'.¹²⁸

In the second image titled '24th June 1975', Hussain 'portrayed Mother India in turmoil. Hence the contorted form of her straddling over the subcontinent, her hair in the multi-coloured Himalayas, her legs bent reaching towards Orissa and Bengal and one of her breasts forming Kutch. This is an expressionist's version of Mother India. It is powerful, enigmatic and memorable.' This drew not only on the mythology of Mother India, but also on the physicality of the gendered body, to represent Gandhi's position and the climactic declaration of Emergency. In the third painting, depicting this declaration and titled 'June

¹²⁴ Jag Mohan referenced and drew upon this booklet in his article 'Hussain's Triptych: India June 1975' *Socialist India*, 11.13 (30 August 1975) 23-24.

¹²⁵ 'Hussain's Interpretation of India in June 1975' *Socialist India*, 11.11 (16 August 1975) 1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Jag Mohan, 'Hussain's Triptych' 23.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

26th 1975', this contorted figure of Mother India 'is transformed into Durga riding the tiger that is roaring. The triple headed Durga is out to triumph over evil.'¹²⁹

Like Hussain's paintings, *India Today* visualised its pro-Emergency stance through the female body. In December 1975, publisher Aroon Purie and his family launched this fortnightly news magazine in order to 'fill in the information gap which exists among persons interested in India residing abroad'.¹³⁰ Its inaugural issue filled this gap with positive reports on the Emergency. Although it later retracted this support and published widely on the regime's excesses after the Congress lost elections in March 1977,¹³¹ December 1975's issue established a pro-Emergency tone that characterised the magazine's position for the next year. One feature, for example, cited rumours about fear, tension and violence following Gandhi's declaration of Emergency, but reported conclusively that 'there was none'.¹³² Its cover page used an image of a woman's face shown in figure 2.4, taken by veteran photographer Madan Mahatta, to symbolise the regime and to visualise this supportive stance.

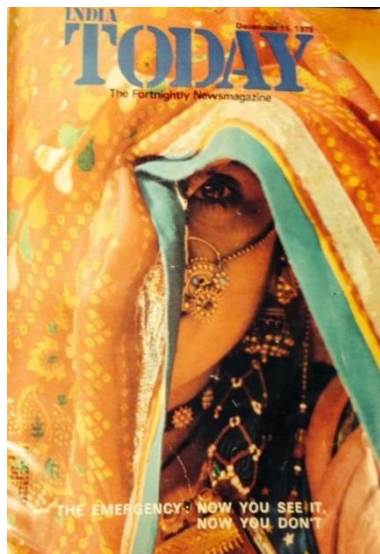


Figure 2.4: Cover page *India Today*, 15 December 1975

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ *India Today* (15 December 1975) 3.

¹³¹ See, for example, Dilip Bobb, 'General Elections: No longer a walk over' *India Today* (15 March 1977) 8-11; 'Congress Debacle' *India Today* (15 April 1977) 19-20; V.P. Bhatua, 'Voices of Dissent' *India Today* (30 April 1977).

¹³² 'Who's Afraid of the Emergency' *India Today* (15 December 1975) 6.

India Today personified this moment of national politics in this woman's partially hidden face and captioned the image 'The Emergency: now you see it now you don't'.¹³³

The magazine cemented these connections in a second image of the pictured woman presented in figure 2.5, which showed her casting off the material covering her head to reveal her smiling face and bare midriff.

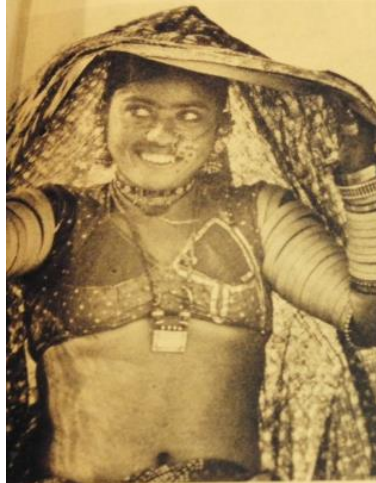


Figure 2.5: 'A better glimpse of the Emergency'¹³⁴

This photograph and its caption underscored the woman's position as the regime's visual embodiment.¹³⁵ The accompanying text asserted that despite controversial reports in the western press, the changes since Gandhi's imposition had 'in many ways, been subtle and therefore difficult to see'. Purie elaborated: 'In some areas, where visitors have expected a military state, they have seen no evidence of an Emergency. It is seen, however, in the efficiency of the government offices and the plugging of illegal activities.'¹³⁶ Picturing the regime in a woman's body, *India Today* invoked benevolent feminine qualities such as subtlety, modesty and gentility, to apply the same characteristics to its assessment of Emergency measures: present but not impinging, peaceful and subtle rather than violent and chaotic.

Opposition often utilised parables centred on femininity, gendered violence and female bodies in order to represent the regime and its brutality. In November 1975, Socialist

¹³³ Ibid., 1.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

George Fernandes penned a letter 'from the underground'. This condemned several aspects of the Emergency, including the recent Supreme Court ruling, which retrospectively cleared Gandhi of the Allahabad High Court's charges and placed the office of Prime Minister above juridical scrutiny.¹³⁷ Fernandes made an analogy with sexual violence to underscore this ruling's illegality:

A man commits rape against a minor girl. The trial court convicts him to six years in prison. The man appeals to High Court against the conviction. Incidentally, the man happens to be the Prime Minister who has a captive parliament under his thumb. He makes the parliament enact a law, which says that the rape of a minor girl is not a crime under the law of the land with effect from the date on which the Prime Minister committed the rape. The High Court then proceeds to hold that the trial court's judgment convicting the man to six years of imprisonment is no longer valid. The man who is the Prime Minister then organises rallies to celebrate his 'great victory' and the 'vindication of his honour'.¹³⁸

Fernandes inverted Gandhi's insistence on her victimised position, instead locating the Prime Minister as attacker, and the example aptly demonstrates the legal absurdity of the retrospective ruling. He couched these points within the highly charged language of sexual violence, utilising rape to symbolise Gandhi's defilement of politics and democratic institutions. This analogy presents a polarised view of women's potential roles, as either an aggressive attacker or symbolic victim. It also highlights that the physicality of the gendered body and sexuality also function as markers of national territory, honour and ideals.

For other opposition leaders women's bodies symbolised the destruction that Gandhi's government brought on the nation. Muthuvel Karunanidhi, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, employed similar narratives in his denunciations of the government's actions at a public meeting in Madras on 6 July 1975. At the meeting, he recited the plot of a play broadcast over AIR, in which a wealthy Lord purchases a 'comely damsel', a woman of 'ravishing beauty', to work for the man and his wife as a slave. Karunanidhi depicted the tale of the wife's treatment of this new slave in her husband's absence in detail:

¹³⁷ George Fernandes went underground when Gandhi declared the Emergency. He was an active member of the underground resistance network until authorities arrested him and several others in June 1976 in what became known as the Baroda Dynamite Case.

¹³⁸ Basu, *Underground Literature*, 23-24.

The lady of the house now ruminates. 'My lord and master could not have brought this good looking girl for attending domestic work alone, he has deeper designs in his mind and I should devise measures to frustrate these schemes.' She sends for the hairdresser and orders the tresses of the slave girl to be clipped in a haphazard manner...Not content with this act of degradation, she takes up a branding iron and draws some gruesome lines on the face of the slave girl – reducing the victim to a horrendous figure. And all the while the lady explains, 'my husband might make love to this girl; and hence it is that I am taking these precautions'.

Karunanidhi mobilised this tale of feminine beauty, jealousy and marital strife to reflect on the current political situation: 'we are witnessing a similar scene in the Indian subcontinent at the present moment...“danger could come through some channel” they say as they crisscross lines on her face wielding a branding iron'.¹³⁹ Karunanidhi explained the government's actions by invoking malevolent feminine traits such as vanity and jealousy.

Like in Fernandes's analogy, a victimised woman's body symbolised the nation, violently disfigured by Emergency measures.

These kinds of representations of Emergency repression proliferated across multiple platforms. *Swaraj* circulated Socialist N.G. Goray's challenge to Gandhi in parliament, in which he asked 'why are you afraid of the press? I would like to ask my friends are you going to make democracy a woman in purdah that nobody should look at her, nobody should touch her and only you will speak to her?'¹⁴⁰ Goray chose a gendered analogy to articulate the Emergency's restrictions on the press and freedom of speech. Left wing publication *Frontier Weekly* deployed similar imagery in some of its coverage of the 1977 elections. Reporting scathingly on the CPI's sudden withdrawal of support for Emergency measures, it claimed that the party now viewed the Congress as 'a woman's body, parts of which are still fine, and though other limbs have been manhandled and lost purity, on the whole it is bedworthy'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Muthuvel Karunanidhi's address to a public meeting, Madras (6 July 1975) Printed Material File No. 67, JP Papers, NMML.

¹⁴⁰ Qtd. in Jack Anderson, 'Repression by Indira' in *Swaraj*, No. 10 (October 1975) Press Clippings File No. 14, JP Papers, NMML.

¹⁴¹ *Frontier Weekly* (19 February 1977) 1.

Female bodies and a feminine aesthetic were also integral to critical visual representations of Emergency politics. Banerjee highlights the importance of the visual spectacle in Emergency power in her emphasis on the 'larger than life, and in some cases, enormous blow ups of her [Gandhi's] figure', which accompanied the Prime Minister's discursive dominance.¹⁴² Banerjee refers to, although does not discuss at length, the visualisation of the opposition's use of malevolent female identities to caricature the regime, largely in the form of political cartoons. The most well-known, like the ones utilising Snow White imagery discussed earlier in this chapter, hold crucial places in the post-Emergency counter narrative. One cartoon that appeared in *Satyavani* on 26 July 1976, shown in figure 2.6, depicted this malevolent femininity through the monstrous female body.



Figure 2.6: Cartoon from *Satyavani*, 26 July 1976¹⁴³

This huge figure of Gandhi illustrates Banerjee's emphasis on the iconography of monstrous female power, and the cartoon grounds its critique in the gendered aesthetic of a woman's dressing room. A coerced tailor unwillingly defaces material labelled 'India's Constitution' swathed around Gandhi's body, visualising her defilement of the democratic constitution for personal ends. Captioned 'better shape it to fit my figure, buster!', the cartoon criticised this personalisation of power and the destruction of the constitution in gendered terms.

¹⁴² Banerjee, 'Political Iconography and the Female Political Leader'.

¹⁴³ Desai, *The Smugglers of Truth*, 47.

The day before the imposition of Emergency, Moraji Desai criticised Gandhi's leadership on similar terms in an interview with Oriana Fallaci, published shortly after the regime was declared. He boldly claimed that 'I, thanks to Mrs Gandhi, have discovered that a woman is unsuited to head a government or rule a country'.¹⁴⁴ The evidence he provided for this inherent unsuitability remained anchored in gendered narratives, as he asserted, 'her only merit lies in being Nehru's daughter'. Speaking on the European interviewer's inability to understand Gandhi's faults, he stated, 'it is always difficult to understand Indians. It is twice as difficult to understand a woman'. Although misogynistic sentiments frame Desai's remarks, some of his comments on Gandhi's conduct resemble Ramachandra Guha's observations about the capacity of women autocrats to employ gendered symbols for political gain. Desai insisted that 'people are inclined to exalt and absolve her because she is a woman. For one thing, a woman in power is so exceptional that one is inclined to attribute her greater merit than she actually possesses, nor does one think of a woman as a dictator....the world has been taken in by that lady's sari.'¹⁴⁵

As Banerjee notes, these representations of monstrous female power often have a gendered and religious component, and they were an integral facet of the opposition's dialogue with Gandhi's Emergency rhetoric: 'monstrosity was of course the other side of deification'.¹⁴⁶ Imagery and narratives of goddesses that located the regime in the context of Mother India serving the nation provided fertile ground for critique. In his discussion of the Prime Minister's personalisation of power after the 1971 elections, Socialist N.G. Goray wrote, 'then came Emergency and she became Amba, Durga and the Delphic Oracle all rolled into one. She was considered wiser than the wisest in the land, she had parliament at her command, neither any law nor the courts could touch her. Never in the long history of our country had any monarch or hero enjoyed such total authority.'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Moraji Desai interview with Oriana Fallaci.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Banerjee, 'Political Iconography and the Female Political Leader.'

¹⁴⁷ N.G. Goray, 'Vanquished? Never!' *People* (9 August 1976) in Basu, *Underground Literature*, 88-89.

These religious iconographies and visceral depictions of the monstrous female body also shaped poetic resistance. K. Satchidanandan's poem depicts how 'The Mother of all good goddesses,/ made the announcement from her fortress;/ let all the tongues be within one fold/ Be bundled up and sacrificed'.¹⁴⁸ In G. Nagaraj Mullur's 'The Black Ordinance', which depicts Gandhi as 'the Durga of Delhi', the monstrous goddess wreaks havoc on the motherland: 'water shall not flow!/ The sun and moon shall not shine!/ The birds shall not sing!' ¹⁴⁹ Vinod Sharma's poem 'Abattoir' depicts a more visceral vision of the monstrous goddess, a 'grotesque breasted ogress/of a mountainous height'.¹⁵⁰ A sense of the mystical pervades the poem as the speaker declares 'now I've the hang of it: this Dame-/ blessed with countless crafted faces,/ long arms,/ is a great spell binding being./ She sweetly pronouncing this, announcing that/ has rendered a simple folk into charming puppets'.¹⁵¹

Rushdie's very characterisation of Gandhi as a widow is in dialogue with her mobilisation of gendered roles. He draws on powerful connotations of Hindu widowhood, conceived in some imaginings not only as a woman's tragic loss, but in the context of her destructive capacities and power over man. He also invokes the long and contentious history of the practice of *sati*, the immolation of a widow following the death of her husband. Throughout, the novel foregrounds the destructive capacities of women. The Widow's actions in the novel culminate in the collapse of Saleem's body: 'my body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history...has started coming apart at the seams'.¹⁵² Given Saleem's embodiment of the nation from his birth at independence, 'handcuffed to history, my destiny indissolubly chained to those of my country', his physical destruction at the hands of The Widow represents Gandhi's destruction of the nation.¹⁵³ This feminine destructive power propels the novel and the events around which the stories of both Saleem and the nation

¹⁴⁸ K Satchidanandan, 'The Tree of Tongues' 1.3-1.6, trans. from Malayam by K. Ayyappa Panikar, in Perry, *Voices of Emergency*, 232.

¹⁴⁹ G. Nagaraj Mullur, 'The Black Ordinance', 1.3-1.6, trans. from Kannada by Chandrashekhar Patil, *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵⁰ Vinod Sharma, 'Abattoir' 2.3-2.4, trans from Hindi by Keshav Malik, *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 12.1-12.6, 4.

¹⁵² Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 37.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9.

pivot. He tells the reader, 'women have made me; and also unmade. From Reverend Mother to The Widow, and even beyond. I have been at the mercy of the so-called (and erroneously in my opinion!) gentler sex'.¹⁵⁴

This chapter has demonstrated that gendered identities and iconographies were critical to the Emergency's political narratives. Gandhi and pro-Emergency forces persistently mobilised gendered narratives in order to articulate and defend the regime. In turn, dominant anti-Emergency narratives produced by organised opposition, in underground literature and in fictional and visual representations often sought to subvert these gendered discourses. Although these subversions represent acts of resistance, their use of stereotypical and binary gendered images have been viewed as problematic. Sunder Rajan argues that although Sanjay's participation in Emergency politics creates 'some historical justification' for Rushdie and other writers' demonisation of Gandhi's Emergency leadership in terms of motherhood:

the hostility in their foregrounding of her widowhood must remain inexplicable except as a culturally conditioned misogyny; and their recourse to supernatural explanations of 'feminine' power (the goddess) is a complete surrender of historical analysis.¹⁵⁵

There is certainly a misogynistic element to some of the critiques presented in this chapter's discussion, particularly Moraji Desai's comments about women's unsuitability for leadership. However, representations of Gandhi, and the Emergency more broadly, that remain steeped in images of the mother/goddess and the female body do not simply surrender historical analysis or perspectives.¹⁵⁶ Whilst these images draw on stereotypical gendered narratives, they remain inextricably connected to the very specific historical and political contexts of the Emergency. Such depictions are in direct dialogue with Gandhi's and pro-Emergency propaganda's own use of these gendered narratives to articulate and

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 404.

¹⁵⁵ Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, 113-14.

¹⁵⁶ I have complicated this explanation of the gendered images used specifically in Rushdie's novel in detail in the following chapter: 'Gender and the Indian Emergency: Representation of Women in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*' in Sandhya Rao Mehta (ed.) *Exploring Gender in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015) 16-34.

defend aspects of the regime. They also remain historically grounded in gendered narratives of the Indian nation, although often confined to binary images of benevolent and malevolent femininity.

Perry muses at length on the kind of demonising that Sunder Rajan interprets as misogynistic in his preface to the anthology:

Many times I have included a fairly impressive poetic performance on an issue which a more careful political analysis would reveal as spurious in its implied arguments or even in some sense childish...surely it is naïve to attack Emergency excesses as if they were entirely attributable to one person, a witch goddess or supremely vicious tyrant...Yet embodying a felt evil situation in such cohesive particular images is precisely one main function and striking technique of poetry.¹⁵⁷

Perry insists that these 'exaggerations' and 'political mistakes' need no excuse because they 'present a state of mind'.¹⁵⁸ They give insights into the affective impacts of the regime's repressive climate and the 'felt evil' of its measures. The gendered discourses discussed in this chapter that shaped both pro-Emergency propaganda and counter narratives often oscillated around binary, dialogic constructions of benevolent and malevolent femininity. Although these narratives shaped the dominant discourses of Emergency politics, they were not prescriptive of women's actual engagements with the Emergency regime, which were altogether more complex and diverse. The rest of the thesis begins to document these.

¹⁵⁷ Perry, *Voices of Emergency*, xix.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Chapter Three: Representing women's support for the Emergency

The previous chapter demonstrated that discourses of femininity and abstract images rooted in women's roles shaped the articulation of the Emergency and resistance to it. This chapter extends that discussion and argues that women were also essential to the Emergency's agenda and its propaganda. Using publications from the Congress and CPI and their affiliated women's groups, the Congress Women's Front and NFIW, I analyse women's roles in expressions of support for the regime. The chapter begins by exploring how women figured in the Congress's political strategy of appealing to the nation's weaker sections and poor, underprivileged majority. It then examines the nature of support from pro-Emergency women's groups, focusing particularly on how they render the relationship between Emergency measures and women's rights and status. Finally, I demonstrate that pro-Emergency propaganda utilised these expressions of support and women to symbolise the regime's popularity, focusing particularly on photographs featured in the Congress's bulletin *Socialist India*.

Two critical findings emerge from this analysis. Firstly, representations of popular support for the Emergency and its measures often foregrounded women's roles, and pro-Emergency forces claimed that these measures were positive for the nation's women. Secondly, documentary evidence about this support raises tensions in relation to women's agency. Anne McClintock's work on the gendered nation argues that 'women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency'.¹ Images of and reports on the Emergency's popularity among women begin to position them as historical actors who actively engaged in support for the regime. However, in much of the evidence discussed here, it is impossible to isolate these expressions of support from the pro-Emergency propaganda in which they appear. They provide some insights about the nature of women's participation in the regime's politics, but

¹ McClintock, 'No Longer in a Future Haven', 90.

mostly demonstrate the centrality of this participation to the Emergency government's propaganda and political strategies.

3.1 'All the minorities are with us': Presenting the Emergency's gains

The Congress's special relationship with the nation's weaker sections and poor majority was central to its image during this period and under Gandhi's Prime Ministership more broadly.² Many commentators highlight the party's frequent recourse to populist rhetoric and appeals to these weaker sections for electoral support, best exemplified in Gandhi's promises to *garibi hatao* and their effectiveness in her 1971 electoral victory. Diego Maiorano shows that these appeals remained an important facet of Gandhi's political strategy into her final term in office (1980-1984).³ Calls to the nation's minorities, weaker sections and the poor for support were critical during the Emergency. The Congress stressed the need to remove opposition and impose strong measures in order to implement progressive policies aimed at uplifting minority and downtrodden groups. One article published in *WOTM* shortly after the declaration of Emergency cautioned, 'let no one run away with the impression that the Emergency proclamation is solely to contain the menacing activity of the disruptionist opposition'. This further insisted, 'the drastic step also provides a positive remedy for the many economic ills that had started eating into the vitals of the society, more gravely affecting its poorer and weaker sections'.⁴

During a television appearance in 1976, an interviewer asked Gandhi 'how is it possible, with the imprisonment of thousands of people who opposed you and your government that this in the end will make Indian democracy stronger?'⁵ She claimed that

² The term 'weaker sections' refers to broad and diverse groups which are characterised in this manner because of their minority or unequal status. The term is commonly associated with religious and linguistic minorities. It also refers to several designated groups for which the Government of India makes special provision: Scheduled Castes (commonly known as *Dalits*); Scheduled Tribes (*Adivasis*) and Other Backward Classes (a classification of socially disadvantaged castes). Although not in a numerical minority, women are often included within the umbrella term 'weaker sections' because of their historically unequal position in society.

³ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, 109-110.

⁴ Bhawani Prasad Banerjee, 'The Need of Emergency' *WOTM*, 19.7 (July 1975) 8.

⁵ 'When PM thought of leaving' *WOTM*, 10.6 (June 1976) 19.

these arrests were necessary to secure the rights of the nation's poor and underrepresented masses: 'we have to take a few into custody against nearly 600 million people. Now, which is more important? When there was this increase in indiscipline, who suffered? It was the poorest people who suffered most...And democracy means the voice of the whole people, not just one section.'⁶ Justifying the Emergency in this manner, Gandhi situated it within the Congress's long-term political goals. In her Independence Day address in August 1976, she similarly reflected on the past year of the regime and insisted that 'the government would not deviate from its chosen path of uplifting the downtrodden and the poor'.⁷

Underprivileged groups featured prolifically in celebrations of the Emergency's achievements. Praising its first one hundred days, DDA Vice Chairman Jag Mohan claimed, 'it is the Emergency that provided the necessary thrust, power and pressure to carry out the immense tasks of social amelioration'.⁸ A *Socialist India* editorial similarly asserted:

Never in the long history of this country have so many things happened for the benefit of the people in such a short time as a mere 100 days...if the Emergency had not been backed by the Prime Minister's twenty-point programme and if both had not been used as catalytic agents, the miraculous transformation of the socio-economic scene would not be taking place.⁹

These alleged changes and their effects on the poor majority and common citizens were integral to pro-Emergency rhetoric. The Congress also foregrounded the Emergency's benefits for the nation's designated weaker sections, particularly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and often highlighted their support for these measures.¹⁰ Celebrating the regime's first year, *Socialist India* claimed that since the declaration of Emergency and its

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 'Government firm on socialist path to uplift the downtrodden: PM' *WOTM*, 20.9 (September 1976) 3-4.

⁸ Jag Mohan, 'Notes for a Future Social Historian: One Hundred Days of Emergency II' *Socialist India*, 11.19 (11 October 1975) 11.

⁹ 'Hundred new gains' *Socialist India*, 11.18 (4 October 1975) 1.

¹⁰ In a television interview in July 1975 Party President D.K. Barooah discussed the Emergency's economic programme, stating that 'Harijans and members of the Backward Classes would also be associated with the implementation of the programme', 'Party news' *Socialist India*, 11.9 (2 August 1975, 3). The bulletin also reported a 'new stir of self confidence among Harijans', which it attributed to the Emergency's economic measures in UP (Ibid., 42). In a piece celebrating the 'energy' instilled by the declaration a month later, *Socialist India* claimed positive Emergency results by pointing to measures aimed at these minority groups, concluding that as a result of Gandhi's imposition 'the weak, the deprived and the dispossessed can live as decent human beings', 'Emergency turning into emergency [sic]' *Socialist India*, 11.10 (9 August 1975) 1.

twenty-point economic programme, 'economic benefits have spread all over India. Wide ranging measures were taken for giving a fair deal to the *Harijans* and the weaker sections, providing them with agricultural land and house sites, freeing them from the clutches of private moneylenders and the ruthless practice of bonded labour, streamlining the public distribution system and holding the price line.'¹¹ Reflections on the Emergency's achievements before elections in 1977 similarly situated its benefits in the context of the nation's weaker sections. One *Socialist India* editorial published in February 1977 claimed that under Emergency measures, 'positive benefits have accrued to the weaker sections, including the Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes...the emphasis is on improving conditions for the poor'.¹²

Scholars have questioned the extent to which the Emergency achieved such miraculous gains in the socio-economic sphere.¹³ However, the regime's populist rhetoric and the immediate relief brought by some of its measures, particularly short-term price stability, did result in much support from these sections. As Sunil Khilnani observes, 'during the years of severe economic crisis, to the poor Indian majority and to many minority citizens, she [Gandhi] was their best hope for prosperity and protection'.¹⁴ Assessments of people's responses to the Emergency suggest that such appeals to minorities and the poor were favourably met. Reflecting on the regime's first sixty days journalist L.S. Herdenia claimed, 'the common man has extended a whole hearted welcome to the Emergency simply because it has brought considerable relief to him'.¹⁵ *India Today* insisted that 'what a handful would consider suppression, millions of Indians do seem to consider emancipation'.¹⁶ Its reflections on the regime's first year also asserted that 'the quality of life after the Emergency has improved so far as the common people were concerned'.¹⁷ Articles

¹¹ Usha John, 'Lifestyle is Changing' *Socialist India*, 13.4 (26 June 1976) 5.

¹² 'PM's Programme has rescued the poor' *Socialist India*, 14.0 (5 February 1977) 9.

¹³ Francine Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004: The Gradual Revolution* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005) 548-561.

¹⁴ Khilnani, 'Indira Gandhi: The centre of everything'.

¹⁵ L.S. Herdenia, '60 days of Emergency' *Socialist India*, 11.14 (6 September 1975) 26.

¹⁶ 'Who's afraid of Emergency?' *India Today* (15 December 1975) 9.

¹⁷ C. Ramachandran, 'A Year of Expectancy' *India Today* (30 June 1976) 10.

featured in this magazine that revolved around citizens' narratives about the regime's benefits reinforce this positive reception.¹⁸ Gandhi and pro-Emergency groups used these expressions of support to full effect in their claims about the regime's success. Defending the declaration to journalists in July 1975 she insisted, 'at this moment all the poorer people, all the minorities, are with us'.¹⁹

In his discussion of Gandhi's populist politics, Khilnani describes her direct appeals 'to the poorest and lowest in the social order: *Dalits*, Muslims and women'.²⁰ Analysts have not considered the gendered specificities of these appeals to women. Assessing Gandhi's entreaties to minorities for support, Maiorano asserts that whilst women technically fall within India's weaker sections:

no significant attempt was made by Mrs Gandhi to appeal to women nationally. Of course, she made sporadic attempts to win their support; however, it is hardly arguable that Mrs Gandhi was a feminist. This does not mean that women did not support her. Indeed, they constituted one of Mrs Gandhi's key constituencies, although no significant attempt to mobilise them was made.²¹

Maiorano is right to emphasise that Gandhi was by no means a feminist. She frequently distanced herself from women's causes and often criticised any lone focus on women's rights, situating women's issues alongside other inequalities. In August 1975, she asserted that 'today I feel that the underprivileged in the world are not only the women...don't think that the men are liberated by any means'.²² In her message to the IWY conference in Mexico just a few days after the declaration of Emergency, she argued that 'the consciousness of rights is not confined to women...it would hardly be correct to assume that men are liberated'.²³ In her address to February 1976's concluding conference of the IWY National

¹⁸ See, for example, 'What people say' *India Today* (15 December 1975) 12; K Muralidharan, 'The impact of Emergency' *Socialist India*, 12.14 (6 March 1976) 22-24. Both of these features include interviews with citizens – restaurant workers, taxi drivers, housewives, students, government employees, *rickshawalas* (rickshaw drivers) – reflecting largely on the benefits brought by the Emergency measures to their daily lives and routines.

¹⁹ 'No country can advance without discipline: PM's candid replies to frank questions from Mexican journalists' *Socialist India*, 11.9 (2 August 1975) 29.

²⁰ Khilnani, 'Indira Gandhi: The Centre of Everything'.

²¹ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, 109.

²² Indira Gandhi, 'On Women's Role in Changing Social Pattern' in *Selected Speeches and Writings* 525.

²³ Indira Gandhi, 'Equal Partners with Men', message to the UN Women's Conference, Mexico (26 June 1975) *Ibid.*, 719.

Committee, Gandhi similarly insisted that 'Indian women could not be given a better status in society unless all Indians – men and women – had better status'.²⁴

In an interview with Mexican journalists shortly after the imposition of Emergency rule, Gandhi discussed IWY measures for women's uplift: 'I view the movement as part of the movement of all those who have been underprivileged'.²⁵ She continued to position women alongside other minorities and underprivileged groups throughout this period. Discussing concessionary provisions for education in an address for SNDT Women's University's diamond jubilee in December 1975, she argued, 'neither women nor any other traditional minority which has traditionally been denied its share of opportunity should be too long dependent on special concessions'.²⁶ Reflecting on women's status in January 1976, *Socialist India* claimed that 'in her capacity as Prime Minister, Smt Indira Gandhi has taken every opportunity to stress the need of doing away with injustice and discrimination against women, whom she has described as the "largest minority"'.²⁷

This persistent location of women alongside other minorities and the broader importance of these in the government's justifications for the Emergency highlight the need to reconsider Maiorano's assertion that mobilising women was not part of Gandhi's political strategy. In December 1975, *WOTM* reported on Gandhi's speech at a public meeting at Lalbahadur Stadium, Hyderabad, in which she declared 'the days of license over for good' because of Emergency measures.²⁸ The report stated that Gandhi 'made it clear that there was no question of allowing "old indiscipline and license to return to the country". While they [the Congress] believed in the freedom of the individual, it could not be allowed to come in the way of the masses of the people, especially those who were unorganised and could not raise their voice, she declared'.²⁹ Gandhi positioned stringent Emergency measures and

²⁴ 'Plan of Action for Women' *WOTM*, 20.3 (March 1976) 1.

²⁵ 'No country can advance without discipline: PM's candid replies to questions from Mexican journalists' *Socialist India*, 11.9 (2 August 1975) 29.

²⁶ 'To be a woman should not come in the way of as person's development' *Socialist India*, 14.5 (1 January 1977) 18-19.

²⁷ Sarala Jag Mohan, 'Women in post-independence India' *Socialist India*, 12.8 (24 January 1976) 5.

²⁸ 'Days of license over for good' *WOTM*, 19.12 (December 1975) 6-7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

restrictions on individual liberties as integral to the government's efforts to protect minority communities and the poor majority who lacked the means to mobilise. 'Democracy did not mean' Gandhi further emphasised, 'the voice of a few and silence of the many'.³⁰ This report continued:

The Prime Minister stressed that every citizen should have equal opportunity to progress despite difference of caste or creed...Democracy should never mean the voice of a few against the rights of the many, she said. The poor, peasants, workers and women had all stood solidly behind the Congress. They knew this was the party that had won and consolidated freedom and this was the party that would protect freedom despite all pressures of the entire world...democracy was important but it could only be real when there was greater equality among the people.³¹

Gandhi connected the Emergency's specific vision of democracy and its restrictions on fundamental rights with the status of the minorities and groups listed. She reaffirmed the particular affinity between her government and these groups of people, in turn suggesting their support for the regime and its restrictions on rights. Gandhi listed women specifically in her assertion of and appeals for support. In fact, she called upon them especially, as 'she particularly enjoined on women that they had a role as mothers in propagating the removals of inequalities'.³²

3.2 Rights, responsibilities and support for the Emergency

The Congress's attempts to mobilise women were met by expressions of support for the regime from organised groups beyond the party's own Women's Front. Sometimes these groups emphasised women's responsibility to participate in Emergency programmes, echoing the regime's broader emphasis on duties and 'disciplined democracy'. Addressing a Congress convention on this subject in early 1976, Gandhi asserted that the Emergency required the recognition 'that we should subordinate personal interest to the larger interest, individual interest to social interest. It is the realisation that duties are higher than rights. It

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹ Ibid., 6.

³² Ibid.

is the consideration for others rather than for the self.'³³ The 42nd Constitutional Amendment Bill, passed in the *Lok Sabha* in November 1976, enforced this. It added a series of fundamental duties to accompany the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution.³⁴ Documenting the bill's rationale and the consultation process behind it, *Socialist India* explained that 'personal rights were sacred but the nation's rights were more sacred'.³⁵

Often, pro-Emergency women's groups actually insisted that the regime was beneficial for women's rights and status, echoing the government's own claims about how the Emergency benefitted women. This was part of its wider rhetoric on the gains afforded to minorities and the weaker sections by the regime, but it also had some distinctly gendered elements. Prior to the imposition of Emergency, Gandhi and Congress leadership depicted the JP-led opposition as a threat to the nation's women. She underscored the need to suppress this threat and called upon women to help achieve this. *WOTM's* report on Gandhi's address to women's groups on International Women's Day (8 March 1975) stressed that their responsibilities 'lay in taking our society towards the right path for our country. Mrs Gandhi called on women to protect the nation's ideals at a time when certain elements were trying to indulge in violence and spreading falsehood'.³⁶ Addressing a meeting of the All India Women's Conference in Lucknow in January 1975, Gandhi similarly 'exhorted women to warn the people against the dangers posed by the evil forces which were trying to lead the country to destruction and to undo all the achievements and progress made over the years'.³⁷ Reporting on this speech, *WOTM* further noted that 'the only aim of these forces, she said, was to ruin the country, its traditions, its values, ideals and principles

³³ *Socialist India*, 12.15 (13 March 1976) 9.

³⁴ These duties mandated that citizens respect and abide by the constitution and its laws; uphold the sovereignty of the nation, sustaining and strengthening its unity and integrity; respect democratic institutions enshrined in the constitution; defend the country and render national and military service when called upon to do so; abjure communalism in any form; cooperate with the state in the implementation of the directive principles to 'promote the common good of the people; abjure violence and safeguard public property; pay taxes according to the law. See 'Fundamental Duties of Citizen' *Socialist India*, 13.8 (24 July 1976) 1; 'A Historic Task Fulfilled' *Socialist India*, 13.23 (6 November 1976) 1-2.

³⁵ 'PM on changes in the Constitution' *Socialist India*, 12.7 (17 January 1976) 3.

³⁶ 'In and around the women's world' *WOTM*, 19.3 (March 1975) 35-41.

³⁷ 'Women warned of disruptionists', *WOTM*, 19.1 (January 1975) 47.

it had stood for. Their attack was an attack on Indian women'. It also quoted Gandhi's assertion that 'some people say that the stir is directed against me or the Bihar assembly. But I think it is an attack on the basic values we stand for and the Indian women whom they are trying to mislead in order to block the avenues of their progress.'³⁸ Gandhi positioned women and women's progress as symbolic of the threat that the JP movement posed to the nation, a threat that she would remove with the imposition of Emergency.

Other leaders, including key figures from affiliated women's groups, endorsed these narratives. In his address to the Lucknow conference, UP Chief Minister H.N. Bahuguna 'warned the people, particularly women, against "double talks" of the opposition parties which were concerned only with capturing power by dislodging Congress'.³⁹ AICC General Secretary and Women's Front leader *Smt* Mukul Banerjee 'exhorted women to frustrate the "conspiracy" of the opposition parties which, she said, wanted to cash in on the miseries of the people'.⁴⁰ NFIW leadership responded similarly to Gandhi's call for women's solidarity against the opposition on International Women's Day. *WOTM* reported that its President Aruna Asaf Ali 'said that Indian women were prepared to help in defending democracy against anti-democratic forces'.⁴¹

As well as foregrounding the danger posed to women by the organised opposition, pro-Emergency literature regularly situated the regime as a tool to support their rights and improve their status. *Socialist India's* reflections on the regime's first three months claimed that 'the lifestyle is changing. Go wherever you will, turn in any direction you want and this will become obvious.' One piece of evidence that it used to support this claim was that 'women are demanding their due place in society and equality in treatment'.⁴² Other celebrations of the Emergency similarly framed its achievements in terms of the benefits it conferred on women. *Socialist India's* edition on the anniversary of its imposition in June

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ 'UP Chief Minister warns against double talk' *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁰ 'Women warned of disruptionists', 47.

⁴¹ 'In and around the women's world' *WOTM*, 19.3 (March 1975) 35.

⁴² 'The lifestyle is changing' *Socialist India*, 11.14 (6 September 1975) 2.

1976 included one celebratory piece titled 'Measures taken for the welfare of women, 1975-1976'.⁴³ This listed a number of gains achieved under the Emergency's twenty-point programme and asserted that because of the regime, 'economic benefits have spread over India'.⁴⁴ Although it referenced measures aimed at benefitting multiple groups of people, its title framed this exclusively in terms of the benefits that the Emergency's economic gains conferred on women.

Socialist India's 1976 Independence Day issue also celebrated the year's progress on the front of women's welfare. Following a broad discussion of the IWY, Kumkum Mathur stated that the year 'saw yet another significant event for the welfare of women in this country. The event was the national Emergency'. Mathur insisted: 'in an atmosphere of all round progress prevailing all over the country during the year of Emergency, vigorous efforts were made to implement measures to promote the development of full participation in the mainstream of national life and to remove the social injustice and disabilities from which they continue to suffer'.⁴⁵ AICC General Secretaries, including women's front leaders *Smt* Maragatham Chandrasekar and *Smt* Purabi Mukherjee, submitted their report to the INC's 75th plenary session in Chandigarh in December 1975. This included a section on the Women's Front's activities and its progress on issues relating to women's welfare. The report stated, 'the main activities of the Women's Front are connected with the International Women's Year. A number of Front members went to the Mexico and Berlin conference. The Women's Front has done commendable work in various fields.' *Socialist India's* feature on this report connected this commendable work directly with the Emergency regime and its achievements, as it titled it 'healthy climate under Emergency'.⁴⁶

Another report on the impact of the twenty-point programme in Assam similarly utilised an example of women's welfare to represent Emergency benefits. *Socialist India*

⁴³ Usha John, 'Measures taken for the welfare of women, 1975-1976' *Socialist India*, 13.4 (26 June 1976) 5-6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Kumkum Mathur, 'Welfare Plans Galore for Women' *Socialist India*, 13.12 (21 August 1976) 36-37.

⁴⁶ 'Healthy climate under Emergency' *Socialist India*, 12.5 (3 March 1976) 46.

asserted that the programme 'has been a watershed in the annals of the history of the country', but praised it particularly for the way in which 'it has ushered in a new socio-economic order in which man and woman has the right to an adequate means of livelihood'.⁴⁷ This suggestion that the Emergency and its political climate was conducive to women's confidence and their ability to articulate demands for their rights was also evident in a piece published in May 1976's bulletin on women's mobilisations against alcohol in Manipur.⁴⁸ The report placed this mobilisation of women, which it described as a 'tremendous awakening', firmly in the Emergency context: 'in the wake of the Emergency, the women of Manipur realised that discipline and good conduct could bring about a total change in the society, and rose as one man against the evil of drinking.'⁴⁹ The report positioned the declaration of Emergency as a catalyst for women's mobilisations, although ironically persistently gendered this activism as male, as they 'rose like one man'.⁵⁰

During this first year of the Emergency and the IWY, the government did institute a number of measures aimed at alleviating challenges faced by the nation's women. These included the Equal Remuneration Act, which ensured equal pay for men and women in some sectors, amendments to the Maternity Benefits Act that extended its remit to women employed in factories and establishments covered by the Employees State Insurance Act (1948) and an amendment to the Civil Service Conduct Rules designed to prohibit dowry. However, the government often situated these efforts to improve women's status primarily, or exclusively, as a means of ensuring women enacted their responsibility to the nation in line with the Emergency's emphasis on duty. In Gandhi's address to the second meeting of the National Committee for IWY, held in July 1975, she placed its core aims firmly in the context of the Emergency's emphasis on discipline and efficiency. She asserted that 'the main purpose of International Women's Year was to create public opinion about equality of

⁴⁷ J.N. Bora, 'New socio-economic order emerging in Assam' *Socialist India*, 13.5 (11 September 1976) 29.

⁴⁸ N Tombi Singh, 'Distant points: women's crusade against drinking in Manipur' *Socialist India*, 12.26 (29 May 1976) 37-38.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

men and women, getting rid of bad habits and *the avoidance of waste* (my emphasis); positioning women as a useful resource to be mobilised.⁵¹ *WOTM*'s report further stated that 'Mrs Gandhi said there was a need for programmes for all citizens, but the stress had to be on women because they could change the situation'.⁵² Gandhi did not assert a special need to attend to women or to improve their unequal status because of IWY agendas. Rather, she advocated their uplift because this would allow them to fulfil their national responsibility and be mobilised as resources in the Emergency agenda of discipline and service to the nation. Gandhi repeated these exhortations in her message to the NFIW's Ninth Congress meeting in October 1976. She stated:

women's organisations must continue efforts to create consciousness among women – not merely a clamour for rights, but the inoculation of a sense of civil and national responsibility. In particular, women's groups should intensify their struggle against groups and forces which oppose secularism, socialism and democracy.⁵³

Whilst dismissive of the kind of 'clamour for rights' that she saw as symptomatic of the JP-led opposition's agitations, Gandhi used narratives of women's rights in attempts to mobilise support for the Emergency.

Women's groups were forthcoming with this support. The CPI's daily newspaper *The Patriot* reported that the National Committee for IWY:

welcomed the proclamation of Emergency by the government and said it had become 'necessary because the anti-people, reactionary elements had by their actions and speeches threatened not only democratic institutions but the very stability and sovereignty of the country'. The committee also called on its constituent units to launch a campaign and mobilise people, particularly women, for the preservation of their democratic rights against fascist forces.⁵⁴

This support permeated the entire IWY machinery, as 'several state branches of the Indian Committee for IWY passed similar resolutions'.⁵⁵ The National Committee also printed the Emergency's twenty-point economic programme in its newsletter and circulated this widely

⁵¹ 'IWY' *WOTM*, 19.9 (September 1975) 34-35.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ NFIW, *Ninth Congress: Published Proceedings* (Jullunder: 8-11 October 1976) 6.

⁵⁴ 'Women resolve to keep vigil' *The Patriot* (3 July 1975) 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

to member organisations and state units.⁵⁶ Addressing the Delhi Committee for IWY, CPI leader Parvathi Krishna, who was also a member of the Indian delegation to the IWY conference held in Mexico in June 1975, argued that 'the Emergency could be used to implement the action programme adopted at the international women's meet in Mexico.'⁵⁷ The NFIW similarly claimed that 'in the new social, economic and political environment heralded by the twenty-point programme of the Prime Minister there should be speedy implementation of the recommendations of the National Conference on Women which met in February 1976'. Specifically, the NFIW argued for intensified implementation of the Emergency's moratorium on rural debt, promises of equitable land distribution and liberation of bonded labour. It emphasised that these measures would directly benefit the nation's women who made up a large proportion of the agricultural labour force. The twenty-point programme specifically, it claimed, would 'open up the path for greater progress of women, enabling them to make better contribution in social production and economic development of the country which will also help raise their status in society'.⁵⁸

The NFIW and its President Aruna Asaf Ali were particularly vocal in organised women's support for the Emergency. Although the head of this CPI affiliated organisation, Ali's relationship to the party was complex, as was her personal stance on Gandhi and the Emergency. A prominent figure in the 1942 Quit India movement, Ali helped found the NFIW in 1954. The group emerged out of India's increasing involvement with the Women's International Democratic Federation, an organisation formed in Paris in 1945 and backed by Communist Parties around the world. Although affiliated to the CPI, many of the women involved in NFIW leadership occupied multiple roles with trade unions and even other parties and Ali was no longer a formal member of the CPI by 1975.⁵⁹ However, Ali's personal

⁵⁶ NFIW, *Ninth Congress*, 21.

⁵⁷ 'Women asked to shed conservatism' *The Patriot* (26 July 1975).

⁵⁸ NFIW, *Ninth Congress*, 49.

⁵⁹ The NFIW retained its affiliation to the CPI when, in 1964, the party split due to ideological differences, resulting in the formation of the CPI (M). For more detail on the emergence of the NFIW see Elisabeth Armstrong, *Gender and Neoliberalism: The All India Democratic Women's Federation* (London: Routledge, 2013) 34-35.

sentiments on the Emergency resonate to some extent with the party's formal response. In her reflections on Gandhi's leadership, Ali emphasised her sympathies with her declaration of Emergency, as 'lawless agitations were fomented by a motley combination of political groups, encouraged by hostile foreign forces intent on toppling her and destabilising India'. She noted that the Emergency 'was supported in the initial stages by me and my colleagues on the left', although she hinted towards a turn away from such support in the regime's later days in her admission that 'there emerged a few months later some distortions of the Emergency regulations'.⁶⁰ Although Ali appears to have undergone the same realisations and change in standpoint as the CPI, her reflections also suggest a deep commitment to Gandhi. She felt personally affected by her defeat: 'after a sleepless night, hearing and pondering the election results as they were announced on the radio, I rushed in the morning to Indira Gandhi without asking for an appointment, and saw her looking most lost and desolate. I myself was greatly affected and found it hard to believe she would no longer be at the helm of affairs.'⁶¹

The NFIW welcomed Gandhi's imposition of Emergency in July 1975. A delegation of its leaders (including General Secretary Vimla Farooqi, Secretary Bina Das and Publicity Secretary P.L. Loomba) called on the Prime Minister and presented her with a memorandum. This memorandum articulated the NFIW's support for Gandhi's declaration of Emergency and particularly its economic measures: 'We fully support the twenty-point economic programme and are asking the three *lakh* members of the NFIW all over the country to give their co-operation in the implementation of this programme.'⁶² The organisation pledged both political support for the regime and the practical services of its members to further the Emergency agenda.

⁶⁰ Aruna Asaf Ali, 'Indira Gandhi: A Symbol of Courage' in Verinder Grover and Ranjana Arora (eds.) *Great Women of Modern India* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1993) 238.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁶² NFIW, 'Memorandum to Indira Gandhi' (7 July 1975) Prime Minister's Secretariat files, 37(625)/75 PMS, NAI.

It articulated this support and rallied its members by foregrounding the regime's benefits for the nation's women and their status, positioning it as a catalyst for women's uplift. After a three day meeting in Delhi in February 1976, the organisation reaffirmed its backing in a resolution, which asked its members to work for 'genuine equality' and 'implement the twenty-point programme forward to the women's decade'.⁶³ In its International Women's Day celebrations in the same year, the NFIW called 'for genuine equality so that they [women] can play an effective role in the work of national reconstruction, implementation of the twenty-point programme and a forward march to the women's decade'.⁶⁴ In both instances, the NFIW connected the agendas of the women's decade and the Emergency's programme. The resolution passed after its meeting in Delhi underscored its support for Gandhi's politics, as it again 'welcomed the declaration of Emergency and said that it was necessary to prevent right reaction' causing 'anarchy in the country'.⁶⁵

Documentation from the NFIW's Ninth Congress, held at Jullundur between 8 and 11 October 1976, abounds in such statements. In her Presidential address to the Congress, Ali stated that 'wherever reactionary forces try to prevent democracy and development, women are impelled to struggle for human rights for they have come to learn that without guarding human rights, women can have no life of dignity and equality'.⁶⁶ Women's rights and activism were also at the heart of reports on the organisation's many protests against the JP-led opposition:

The women of India, because of their long tradition of anti-imperialist struggle and rich experience, could recognise the real face of Jayaprakash Narayan and other forces behind his so called Total Revolution... They realised that the forces supporting JP viz. RSS, Jana Sangh, Ananda Marg and other reactionary elements both within and outside state machinery together with the support of the CIA agents are out to destabilise India's economy and subvert its democratic structures. These are the forces that have always resisted measures for the emancipation of women adopted by our parliament.⁶⁷

⁶³ 'Women to work for effective equality' *The Patriot* (21 February 1976) 8. Leading on from the designation of 1975 as the IWY, the UN declared 1975-85 the 'women's decade.'

⁶⁴ 'NFIW to observe 8 March as solidarity day' *The Patriot* (7 March 1976) 8.

⁶⁵ 'Women to work for effective equality', 8.

⁶⁶ NFIW, *Ninth Congress*, 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

Because of the JP-led movement's direct threat to women's emancipation, the remainder of the report described how the NFIW conducted 'effective and spectacular demonstrations throughout India including Bihar, the home state of JP, against the dangerous policies of this movement of Total Revolution'.⁶⁸

The Ninth Congress's published proceedings suggest that the NFIW's opposition to these forces and its support for the Emergency was a critical aspect of its agenda during this period. Celebrations of the organisation's actions on this front constituted large sections of the reports. One of these recorded, 'the NFIW and its branches in this period have carried on a consistent campaign against the movement launched by Jayaprakash Narayan and other parties of right reaction to subvert democracy and destroy democratic institutions'.⁶⁹ A working paper also drew attention to the NFIW's memorandum expressing its support for Emergency rule and its 'fitting corollary' the twenty-point plan and reaffirmed this support.⁷⁰ *The Patriot* reported extensively on the NFIW's Emergency endorsements at the Congress and emphasised that all branches of the organisation echoed them. It described the meeting as a 'great show of solidarity', and drew attention to Vimla Farooqi's observation that 'the Indian women in general support the cause taken up by the NFIW. However, it got widest support on the issues concerning education of women [and] the implementation of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's twenty-point programme'.⁷¹

The Ninth Congress's report detailed numerous activities that the NFIW undertook to assist this implementation. It organised *padayatras* (marches) in rural areas to spread the programme's message, collected information about the implementation of land ceiling laws, the allotment of house sites to the poor and moneylenders' behaviour, and formed committees to monitor price rises.⁷² In Maharashtra, NFIW groups worked explicitly on Emergency measures, specifically to 'persuade the government to take up slum

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ 'NFIW Meet: A great show of solidarity' *The Patriot* (15 October 1976) 8.

⁷² NFIW, *Ninth Congress*, 33-40.

improvement programmes in cities like Bombay'.⁷³ In Ludhiana, Punjab, the NFIW 'took up a regular campaign among women about the danger of fascism in India' after the declaration of Emergency. Members in Karnataka participated in the anti-fascist conference held in November 1975, and in West Bengal, the NFIW took part in state-wide rallies throughout August and September 1975.⁷⁴ This state's affiliated NFIW committees also held meetings and events, where demands set out included the 'implementation of the twenty-point programme to enable women to attain status of genuine equality'.⁷⁵ The Delhi State Federation held sixteen meetings across the capital, in which 'the twenty-point programme and various other aspects of the NFIW slogans for this occasion were explained'.⁷⁶

Organised women's groups also welcomed the Emergency's political changes. In a report on the proposals outlined in the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Bill, *The Patriot* underscored women's support. It recorded that 'a convention of representatives of over sixty organisations of women in the capital wholeheartedly supported the proposed amendments to the constitution'. This meeting, which included representatives from the NFIW as well as regional groups, unanimously passed a resolution praising the bill because it would 'serve to make our constitution a potent and effective instrument of socio-economic revolution'.⁷⁷ As well as lending its support to the bill and its final format, the women's meet also suggested some ways in which changes to the constitution might help secure improvements to women's status. The women's organisations did not only echo the government's claims about the Emergency's benefits for women, but exhibited a degree of autonomy by setting out further ways that this legislation might be utilised to better their position. Particularly, its resolution called for changes to the fundamental right to property, and argued for the creation of a new clause declaring that men and women would jointly own property in equal shares after marriage.

⁷³ Ibid., 84

⁷⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁷ 'Women's meet supports bill on statute' *The Patriot* (28 October 1976) 1.

Literature from pro-Emergency parties also provides examples where women supported the regime because it eased problems they faced on a daily basis. For some, its economic measures, particularly price controls, improved their position.⁷⁸ For others, the regime's inauguration of discipline alleviated issues arising from gendered inequalities and even violence. This is evident in the narratives of several female students and their emphasis on the increased safety that Emergency regulations brought to university campuses. In July 1975, *The Patriot* reported that as part of the Emergency's crack down on 'anti-social elements', Delhi police issued a warning that 'it will take drastic action against anyone indulging in hooliganism, eve teasing, ragging [bullying, suggesting violence] and anti-social activities in the university campus which opens next week'. It recorded, 'the arrangements include intensive patrolling of university areas, posting of police parties at sensitive points and deployment of women police in plain clothes to prevent eve teasing'.⁷⁹ The effects of these measures, and their reception, were by no means universal. They differed across campuses and locations and female students' responses varied. Whilst some welcomed the increased safety others, especially left wing, politicised women, resented the increased policing and the manifestation of Emergency regulations in campus spaces.⁸⁰

Socialist India's March 1976 issue included a special feature on 'what Emergency means to them'.⁸¹ This collection of people's perceptions of the regime dominated the issue's cover and the bulletin explored them further in a double page spread 'on the impact of Emergency'.⁸² Half of the narratives praising the regime came from students and *Socialist India* focused almost exclusively on female students' narratives. Excerpts from the two of these that featured on the cover page praised the discipline inaugurated by the declaration of Emergency on campuses and particularly the benefits of this for women's safety. One

⁷⁸ I discuss this in detail in chapter five.

⁷⁹ 'Warning against eve teasing, ragging' *The Patriot* (7 July 1975) 8.

⁸⁰ See chapter five's discussion of the affective intrusions of the Emergency for female students at Miranda House College, Delhi University.

⁸¹ 'What Emergency means to them' *Socialist India*, 12.4 (6 March 1976) 1.

⁸² K Muralidharan, 'The impact of Emergency' *Ibid.*, 22-24.

example read, 'a girl student: The ragging in my college claimed a life last year. This year there has been no ragging. The life on campus is disciplined and peaceful.' The second instance pointed to the opinion of 'another girl student: The boys of my college used to keep girl students in perpetual terror at the point of knife. This year there is complete discipline in the college.'⁸³ This cover page also utilised narratives from a male restaurant owner, a stenographer and a DDA official to suggest widespread people's support for Emergency measures. These contributors couched their praise in terms of the regime's positive effects on their working lives, contrasting the women's emphasis on how the Emergency brought tangible relief from threats of physical violence.

Suman Lata Jain was a student at Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur College, Delhi University. She reflected on both the specific benefits of the Emergency on the campus and more broadly on its positive elements in her interview with *Socialist India*. She observed that 'the Emergency has brought about a conspicuous change among the people', citing orderly queues at bus stops and price reductions. However, Jain insisted, 'the greatest impact of the Emergency is perhaps visible on the student community'. She supported this claim with a discussion of her own university experience: 'my college was full of *goonda* elements till last year. Every newcomer to the college was subjected to the torturous treatment of ragging.'⁸⁴ Fellow female student of Venkateswara College, Delhi University, S.R. Bandu made similar comments about reduced violence: 'the campus is now calm and quiet. Skipping classes and going on strikes has become a thing of the past. Discipline and dedication have taken their place.' In her testimony, she specifically thanked Gandhi for 'bringing about all of these changes'.⁸⁵

Another report in *Socialist India* published in June 1976 asserted that the campus 'is a wonderful sight to see now...There is happiness all around. There is a smile on every

⁸³ 'What Emergency means to them', 1.

⁸⁴ 'The Impact of Emergency', 22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

face. You see the boys and girls strolling on the lawns and corridors in the best of moods.’⁸⁶ The reporter credited the ‘silent revolution’ brought by the Emergency for engendering this peace. *Socialist India* also quoted a female student’s reflections to support this: ‘our Prime Minister has wrought this revolution before our very eyes...I remember the horrors I went through two years ago and it still makes me shiver...You do not know the extent to which ragging was carried.’ This report stressed that the regime had rid the campus of a distinctly gendered violence, as the student noted that prior to this ‘revolution’, ‘girls were even asked to parade naked in the presence of their women-seniors inside the rooms. Some had to walk barefoot on glass pieces...These ugly scenes have disappeared.’⁸⁷ March’s feature presenting people’s support for Emergency measures through women’s narratives also praised the regime for removing violent threats against female students. Shefali, from Ram Lal Anand College, Delhi University, told *Socialist India*:

Goondaism was the order of the day in my college before the Emergency. Students carried knives with them and took them out at the slightest pretext. What was worse, the boys of the college kept the girl students at perpetual terror at the point of the knife. They used to order which girl could talk to whom and for how long. If a girl defied her own orders she did so at her own risk. This year things are different. No boy can dare order any girl do what he wants. There is complete discipline within the college.⁸⁸

Shefali contended a campus wide transformation which revolved around increased safety for female students; a reduction in a distinctly gendered form of violence.

3.3 Symbolising popular support

These excerpts from students and reports on women’s groups’ activities reveal the terms on which some women supported Emergency measures and engaged with its politics. Individual and organised groups of women expressed support for the regime because of their perceptions about its capacity to safeguard or improve their rights and status. However, it is difficult to remove these showcases of women’s support from the context of

⁸⁶ R Murali Manohar, ‘The campus in Delhi, peaceful and quiet’ *Socialist India*, 13.10 (7 June 1976) 25.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ ‘The Impact of Emergency’, 23.

the pro-Emergency propaganda in which they appear. The emphasis that the Congress's weekly bulletin *Socialist India*, for instance, placed on these women's narratives and the prominence it accorded to depicting the regime's benefits for and popularity among women also suggest that this depiction of gendered support was a critical facet of this propaganda.

The Congress Parliamentary Board's resolution endorsing Gandhi's declaration of Emergency declared that 'the country has witnessed a massive and spontaneous upsurge of people's confidence in support of the Prime Minister and the policies of the Congress Party in an unprecedented and unique manner'.⁸⁹ Party member Bhawani Prasad Banerjee claimed that 'it is clear from the reactions all over the country that the people have welcomed this step and breathed a sigh of relief'.⁹⁰ *The Patriot* similarly observed that the declaration of Emergency precipitated 'support from all sections'.⁹¹ Both the Congress and CPI used examples of women's support to demonstrate this popularity, citing numerous resolutions, memoranda and women's meets convened to express their solidarity with Gandhi's Emergency actions.⁹²

In May 1976, *WOTM* reported on Gandhi's *padayatra* in her constituency Rae Bareilly:

Braving the hot sun and the clouds of dust raised by a westerly wind, Mrs Gandhi literally made hut to hut visits for 45 minutes and mixed freely with old and young women in *ghunghat* (veil) who had gathered at their doorstep every 100 metres on the route. At many places women touched her feet, others garlanded her, showered her with petals and *batashas* (sweets) on her, applied *tilaka* to her forehead.⁹³

This depicted an outpouring of support from women. A *Socialist India* feature on a rally for the Emergency's twenty-point programme in Ahmedabad highlighted that 'people from all different walks of life participated in the procession'. It drew particular attention to the

⁸⁹ 'Congress Parliamentary Board Plead Anew with Prime Minister to Continue' *WOTM*, 19.7 (July 1975) 18.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ 'Support from all sections' *The Patriot* (28 June 1975) 1.

⁹² For example: 'Rajasthan Women Legislators Plea' *WOTM*, 19.7 (July 1975) 26; 'Women Resolve to Keep Vigil' *The Patriot* (3 July 1975) 8; 'Women lawyers meet PM to assure support' *The Patriot* (9 August 1975) 8; 'All India Young Women's Conference' *WOTM*, 19.11 (November 1975) 11; 'Anti-Fascist Conference: Smt Mukherjee addressing the women's delegation' *Socialist India*, 20.3 (20 December 1975) 33; 'Gujarat Women's Front Exhibition' *Socialist India*, 12.22 (1 May 1976) 21.

⁹³ *Tilaka* refers to a mark made to the forehead, a Hindu custom indicating welcome and honour. 'PM blazes a new trail' *WOTM*, 20.5 (May 1976) 6.

presence of socio-economically disadvantaged groups, such as 'hand cart pullers, slum dwellers, railway porters, cycle and auto-rickshaw drivers', and the 'large number of women and children' present.⁹⁴ One of *The Patriot's* reports on the crowds flocking to express their solidarity with the Prime Minister in November 1975 similarly observed that 'women, ex-servicemen, doctors and teachers were among those who called at 1 Safdarjung Road [Gandhi's residence] on Wednesday to greet the Prime Minister and reiterate their solidarity with her'.⁹⁵

Socialist India insisted that the 'hundred new gains' and 'happiness and hope to millions' achieved in the regime's first months could not be measured by figures. Instead, 'they have to be seen in the faces of the people'.⁹⁶ The bulletin regularly depicted these, visualising popular support through photographs of crowds, audiences and rallies. The party deployed this tactic particularly at climactic points for the regime, for instance, in the immediate aftermath of Gandhi's declaration of Emergency rule and in the run up to elections in March 1977. Trina Nileena Banerjee underscores the importance of 'spectacle' to Emergency propaganda, particularly in the proliferation of Indira Gandhi posters that appeared in Delhi. Striking visual depictions of the crowds expressing solidarity with the Prime Minister and suggesting widespread support for her Emergency actions were also a crucial part of this visual propaganda. Banerjee observes, 'the attempt to use spectacle to mark popular support began early with the collection of massive crowds in front of Mrs Gandhi's residence in 1 Safdarjung Road on 12 June 1975, right after the Allahabad Court judgment'.⁹⁷ Close analysis of the Congress's representation of these crowds reveals that this was a distinctly gendered spectacle. Women frequently dominated photographs depicting mass support for Gandhi and the Emergency published in *Socialist India*.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ 'Big Ahmedabad rally in support of twenty-point programme' *Socialist India*, 12.22 (1 May 1976) 31.

⁹⁵ 'Ex-servicemen, women and doctors greet Prime Minister' *The Patriot* (13 November 1975).

⁹⁶ 'Hundred new gains' *Socialist India*, 11.18 (4 October 1975) 1.

⁹⁷ Banerjee, 'Political Iconography and the Female Political Leader'.

⁹⁸ *Socialists India* did not accompany any of the photographs featured in this discussion with textual information about their origins. The bulletin usually, although not always, included a small textual caption explaining these images, but rarely credited them to a particular photographer or studio. It

Elections in Gujarat, held in June 1975, were a critical moment in the political confrontations leading up to Gandhi's imposition of Emergency. Although the Congress was ultimately unsuccessful at the polls, *Socialist India's* pre-election coverage depicted widespread support from Gujarati citizens. The bulletin's special issue on this election included three images on its cover. These showed Congress Party President Barooah greeting male candidates, Gandhi at a microphone 'addressing a largely attended public meeting in Siddhpur in Northern Gujarat' and the crowd at Siddhpur, as seen in figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1: Women at a rally in Siddhpur, northern Gujarat⁹⁹

I argue that this is an exclusively gendered representation of public solidarity. Women, or more specifically mothers with their children, embody popular support for Gandhi and the party on this page. The bulletin captioned the image: 'The women in the audience are seen trying to protect themselves from the scorching sun by raising a long piece of cloth over their heads.'¹⁰⁰ The photograph simultaneously underscored women's centrality to electoral

did so in only a handful of instances throughout 1975-1977. In its June 21 1975 issue, the bulletin featured images of Gandhi giving speeches with the following information accompanying the captions: 'Photos: Gopal Chitra Kuteer' (18a). This Delhi based private studio was also credited with the photographs that appeared in the 3 January 1976 issue depicting the 75th Plenary Session of the Indian National Congress (28a-28d). On 10 April 1976, the party credited another studio 'PANA' for photographs showing the Congress President D.K. Barooah's visit to Sikkim that graced its front cover. *Socialist India* also attributed a small number of images to an individual photographer 'R.D Rawal' (21 June 1975, 36; 5 July 1975, 2). The Congress Party did credit external or private photographers where its bulletin used their images. In all other instances, including the photographs discussed in this chapter, where it provided no detail the images can only be assigned to the Congress Party, as this bulletin's publisher.

⁹⁹ *Socialist India*, 11.1 (5 June 1975) 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

politics and foregrounded their vulnerability in this public space, as 'raising a long piece of cloth to cover their heads' the women braved the heat and sun to show their support. Placing this image alongside the close up of Gandhi speaking, *Socialist India* suggested a particular affinity between her and the female audience.

This bulletin cemented these connections in a Press Trust of India (PTI) report entitled 'Women know their sisters'. Its opening line depicted the 'warm welcome given to the Prime Minister wherever she goes in Gujarat,' projecting Gandhi's popularity ahead of the election. This framed a more specific discussion of her popularity among women: 'women are turning out in large numbers to see and hear *Smt* Indira Gandhi on a whirlwind election tour in Gujarat'.¹⁰¹ The report repeated the same emphasis on sacrifice and vulnerability embodied in figure 3.1's caption. 'Braving the severe heat' it stated, 'they gather at roadsides sometimes with *mangal kalash* to welcome her and to have a close glimpse of the Prime Minister.'¹⁰² This underscored women's support for Gandhi and demonstrated her attempts to mobilise that support:

At every meeting she refers to the hardships housewives have to undergo in these difficult days with high prices and shortage. 'As a mother I very much understand your difficulties. Housewives have to bear the brunt of running the house. In keeping with Indian culture and tradition you will never eat before you have fed your men and your children. If the kitchen is empty by then you might say "today is my *upvas* (fast)"', she says. Smiles dance on the faces in the women's enclosure and cheers go up.

Gandhi positioned women as the primary victims of pre-Emergency economic hardships. The CSWI's report highlighted the widespread, problematic practice whereby women eat last within the family to offset such hardship, often to the detriment of their health.¹⁰³ It viewed this as symptomatic of women's unequal status. Gandhi presented this inequality as an acceptable solution to rising prices and commodity shortages, which were fuelling agitations and opposition. She mobilised the subordinate status of women in an attempt to rally female voters.

¹⁰¹ 'Women know their sisters' Ibid., 6.

¹⁰² *Mangal kalash* refers to a pot or vessel used in Hindu rituals or on important occasions as a sign of welcome.

¹⁰³ CSWI, *Towards Equality*, 311.

The PTI report refers to the 'women's enclosure', demonstrating that these meetings often separated male and female audience members. Photographers chose to capture women's sections of the crowd separately and *Socialist India's* editors chose to use these to display popular support after the declaration of Emergency. This strategy shaped the bulletin's use of images in its 5 July 1975 issue, which included a four-page photograph feature. Its title, 'The People's Tryst with the Prime Minister', invokes Jawaharlal Nehru's famous 'Tryst with Destiny' speech, delivered at independence, and indicates the Congress's intention to display popular support for the Emergency among citizens.¹⁰⁴ Half of this feature's eighteen photographs picture women expressing this support exclusively. This is entirely disproportionate to their presence in the bulletin's near forty pages of text, which included just one report on Gandhi's message to the IWY conference. Whilst women hardly featured in the Congress's textual commentary on the newly imposed regime, they played a significant role in its visual depictions of mass support for its measures.

The first page of this feature included three images of the Prime Minister and figure 3.2, the only photograph of popular support, showing a large crowd of women and children marching with placards and signs.

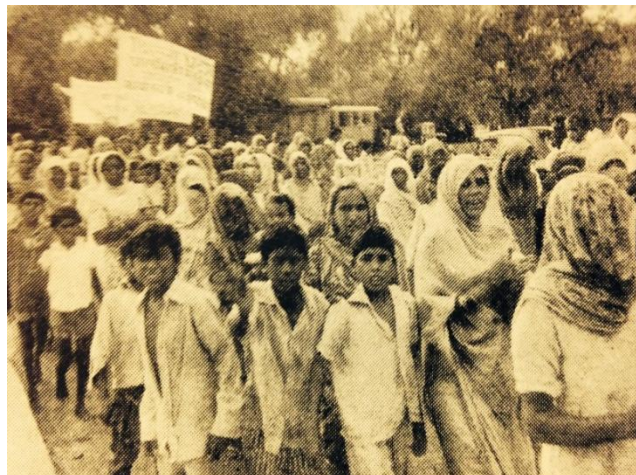


Figure 3.2: 'Women and children marching in hundreds to the Prime Minister's residence on 14 June'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Socialist India*, 11.5 (5 July 1975) 18a-18d.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 18a.

The women are visually prominent and easily identifiable by their covered heads and dress. This page's projection of mass support is distinctly gendered, once again embodied by mothers. This photograph depicts a march that took place on 14 June, before Gandhi imposed the Emergency. *Socialist India* used pictures retrospectively in this issue, drawing on images of crowds captured in the pre-Emergency atmosphere, when rallies and addresses dominated Delhi. However, considered alongside the rest of the issue's content, which focused almost entirely on Emergency measures, their presence here implies that these women extended their support to the newly imposed regime. Similarly, the second page of this special feature contained four photographs, including three images of the party elite – the Prime Minister speaking, a group of journalists surrounding her and the Chief Minister of Orissa accompanying Gandhi to a rally. Again, *Socialist India* used an all-female crowd to represent popular support: 'a group of women from the hill areas in colourful costumes listening to the Prime Minister on the 18th'. The text foregrounded the female composition of the crowd in their 'colourful costumes' and stressed the fact that they were 'listening to the Prime Minister'; invoking that particular solidarity between Gandhi and her female supporters.¹⁰⁶

Depictions of women's support in a variety of forms continued to dominate the bulletin.



Figure 3.3: 'A large contingent of women from the south'¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 18b.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 18c.

The women pictured in figure 3.3 ‘passed through Delhi on 21 June in the course of their *Bharat Darshan* (India tour)’ and ‘called on the PM’. Foregrounding that they were ‘from the south’, the bulletin dismissed geographical or regional contexts, suggesting pan-Indian female support and appealing to women as a category, irrespective of their location or other affiliations. This page also featured an image of the ‘PM with Congress *Seva Dal* (grass roots organisation) workers, who came to express their unstinted loyalty’. Although the text does not gender this audience, the image does, depicting female workers only. It pictured Gandhi stood on an elevated podium addressing the seated and smiling women, whose eyes were all fixed upon her. Another image on this page showed ‘a group of elderly women singing *kirtan* (Hindu devotional songs)’ and ‘Muslim women carrying placards “women’s raj” and “down with men”’ as ‘they called on the Prime Minister’.¹⁰⁸

Despite allowing women visual dominance, *Socialist India* featured Gandhi primarily; she appears in each of these photographs and in the forefront, often positioned standing over groups of female supporters. The bulletin did not aim to highlight these women or their respective causes. Rather, it sought to project the vast nature of female support for the Prime Minister and the recently imposed Emergency. This strategy continued in the final page of this special. One image captured ‘a group of young college girls [who] turned up on the 19th. Their placard hailed *Smt* Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi as the “*Lokpreye* (loved by the people) PM”’.¹⁰⁹ Although this shows the college girls holding a sign, Gandhi is open mouthed in the picture; she is the one speaking. Figure 3.4 pictures ‘a group of pilgrims who passed through Delhi’ and ‘made it a point to be photographed with her – a memento to adorn their homes’.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 18d.

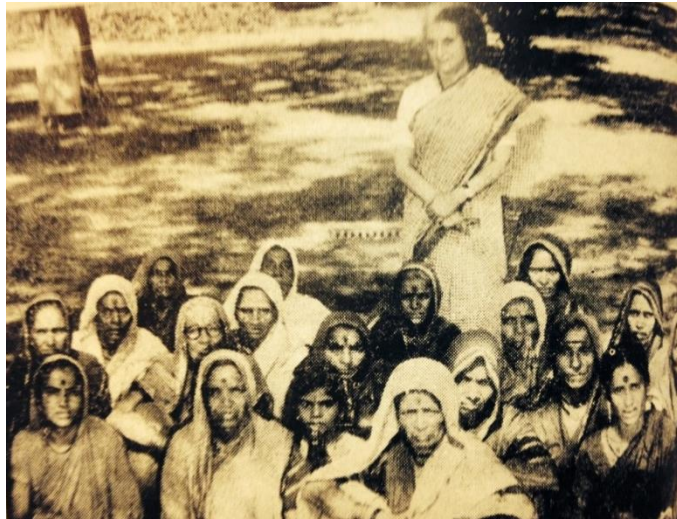


Figure 3.4: 'On 25 June, a group of pilgrims passed through Delhi'¹¹⁰

Although the image depicts a group of women Gandhi stands tall and dominant. Unlike those featured on the previous page campaigning for 'down with men', the bulletin renders these women's presence supporting the Prime Minister in line with their domestic roles: simply as a 'memento to adorn their homes'. The photographs in this whole collection featured students, elderly women, Congress workers, mothers, women from the north and south, from urban and rural locations, both Hindu and Muslim. This offered a distinctly gendered projection of public support for the Emergency and its leader, which foregrounded solidarity from a diverse range of women, transcending other areas of distinction.

Socialist India's Independence Day special in August 1975 also demonstrated this strategy in its front and back cover pages, which link together to form one visual spread, shown in figure 3.5.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

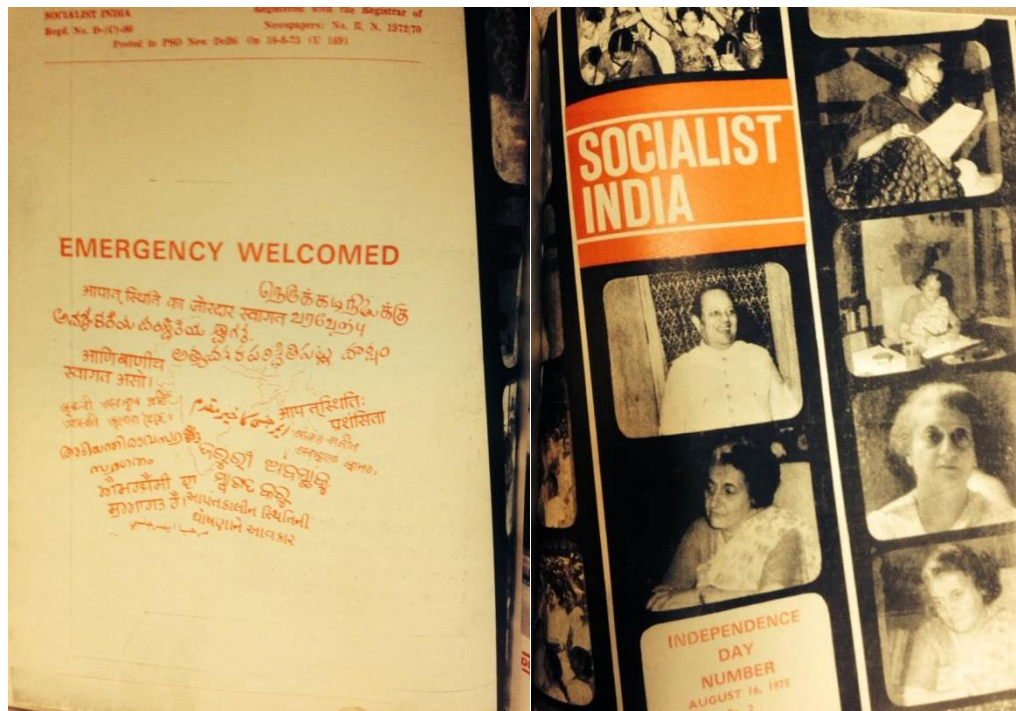


Figure 3.5: *Socialist India*'s Independence Day issue, August 1975¹¹¹

A collection of small images, nine clearly discernible, adorns the front and part of the back page. They visually reinforce Gandhi's personal power and centrality to the politics of Emergency. Five of the photographs show her alone working, speaking or writing. The other three depict crowds or groups that appear particularly significant when read against the text on the back page: 'Emergency welcomed', in English and several Indian languages. The rest of the images visualise this welcoming and all three picture only women. In the clearest of the photographs, open-mouthed women raise their hands, presumably welcoming the Emergency and praising the Prime Minister. *Socialist India* did not caption these photographs, nor did the rest of the issue include any textual elaboration. Despite the important role of women in embodying all India support for the regime, *Socialist India* did not vocalise their welcoming. We must assume that it was in line with Gandhi's and the Congress's wider discourses on the regime's popularity, particularly among women.

Such visual depictions continued in *Socialist India* throughout 1976 to 1977 but occurred most frequently at significant milestones or points of vulnerability for the party,

¹¹¹ *Socialist India*, 11.11 (16 August 1975) 1 & 126.

when the need to project an image of mass support was most pressing. These dwindled during the final months of 1976 but notably returned when on 18 January 1977, Gandhi relaxed Emergency measures and announced that the nation would go to the polls in March. In the subsequent election fervour, the bulletin revived its use of photographs and on 12 February again began visualising mass support regularly. One page featuring an extensive report on Gandhi's election campaign also pictured 'a vast sea of humanity', a thronging crowd with barely discernible faces, reinforcing the caption's emphasis on volume. The close up of the image showed women only, smiling and raising their arms in the air, actively supporting Gandhi's campaign with visually prominent gestures.¹¹² The same stress on female dominated crowds saturated the 5 March issue, which was primarily concerned with supporting and documenting Gandhi's campaign. It reported on meetings and quoted extensively from her election speeches, foregrounding her defence of Emergency measures: 'though it was a bitter pill, it had its effect. There was discipline all over the country and economic stability was also achieved.'¹¹³ Figure 3.6 illustrated these speeches and depicted the crowd she addressed.



Figure 3.6: Gandhi addressing an audience in Delhi on 1 March 1977¹¹⁴

Socialist India superimposed a close up of Gandhi at the microphone next to a cropped image of the large crowd, resulting in a skewed perspective that visualised only the Prime Minister and her female supporters.

Socialist India's issue covering elections is rife with visual representations of India's electorate foregrounding women. A report entitled 'spotlight on elections' featured

¹¹² *Socialist India*, 14.12 (12 February 1977) 18c.

¹¹³ *Socialist India*, 14.14 (5 March 1977) 3.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

images of men and women queueing to vote in a constituency in Haryana and a woman voting, as seen in figure 3.7.

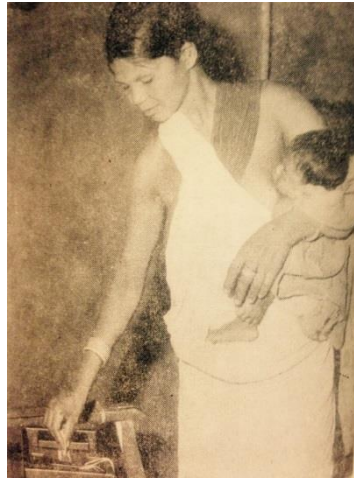


Figure 3.7: 'An *Adivasi* woman exercising her franchise'¹¹⁵

Although the caption remains neutral, the photograph is distinctly gendered. The bulletin presented this *Adivasi* not as a voter, but as a woman and mother, child in arms, latched to its mother's breast.¹¹⁶ Women symbolising the nation voting also dominated a feature titled 'election cameos' in the same edition of the bulletin. One image showed a woman voting, captioned, 'an official applying indelible ink on the finger of a voter at the Rae Bareilly constituency where the PM, *Smt* Indira Gandhi, contested'.¹¹⁷ Another pictured 'vote conscious tribal women in colourful attire in a booth in the north eastern region'.¹¹⁸ The visual dominance of women voting appears to display some kind of political agency as well as an affiliation between these women, their votes and the pro-Emergency, pro-Congress sentiments that filled the rest of the bulletin's text. However, the bulletin's presentation of these images and their captions often depoliticised the pictured women. In Figure 3.7, for instance, the *Adivasi* woman's motherhood is in the visual fore – she is primarily a mother rather than a member of the electorate.

¹¹⁵ 'Spotlight on Elections' *Socialist India*, 14.17 (26 March 1977) 14.

¹¹⁶ This photo, the origins of which were not included in the caption, also featured in the CPI's reports on the elections: 'An *Adivasi* woman voter casting her vote at a polling booth in Jagdalpur' *The Patriot* (18 March 1977) 7.

¹¹⁷ *Socialist India*, 14.17 (26 March 1977) 16.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

This depoliticisation of women voters continued throughout this issue of the bulletin. *Socialist India's* depiction of men voting tended to focus on their collective franchise. It featured, for example, one image captioned, 'voters on a tractor proceeding to a polling station in Rohtak'¹¹⁹ and another showing 'male voters standing in a queue to cast their votes at a polling booth in Sonapat constituency in Haryana'.¹²⁰ Both images visualised male voters in masses – in a long queue and piled, overflowing into a truck. On the contrary, it usually pictured women voting in isolation. Two photographs depict close ups of female voters' bodies so that the rest of the voting background is not visualised.¹²¹ The women's faces are veiled and in both instances, the images show their hands placing papers into the ballot box. This contrasts to the practice, in the earlier moment of crisis following the declaration of Emergency, of visualising large crowds of gendered support. Collectively, these photographs of individual women voting on the regime still suggest the support of women as a group because of the diversity of women featured. 'Election Cameos' depicted mothers, elderly women, *Adivasis*, women from the north east and veiled women. Whilst visualising engagement from various groups, by representing women usually in isolation *Socialist India* refused to visualise their collective voting power, whereas it foregrounded this in its depiction of men's voting practices. The two images of women at the ballot box reinforce this sense of depoliticisation as their faces appear hidden.

Women appear as symbolic in these examples of visual spectacle as the Congress utilised them to represent and encourage popular support. This chapter has demonstrated that these depictions were not unwarranted. Individuals and groups of women, particularly those affiliated to pro-Emergency parties, were forthcoming with this support. However, representations of this support often simultaneously undermined their agency, or ultimately prioritised the Emergency's narrative of national responsibility over women's rights and status. Nira Yuval-Davis notes that women 'often symbolise the collective unity, honour and

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹²¹ Ibid., 17-18.

raison d'être of specific national and ethnic projects'.¹²² Women in part, construct gendered national narratives but in turn, these narratives also become constitutive of women's roles. Women belonging to pro-Emergency groups traversed a similar balance. They acted as symbols of the regime in its propaganda, but also participated in the realities of Emergency politics. In her study of women's roles as symbols in contemporary *Hindutva*, Sikata Banerjee emphasises that such gendered constructions do not necessarily prohibit their participation in these national projects nor render them exclusively as passive symbols. She argues that women may actively draw on these narratives in order to 'negotiate their way into this landscape'.¹²³ Documentary evidence from pro-Emergency political parties and women's groups shows that foregrounding women's support for the regime and positioning it as beneficial for their status was a critical part of the Congress's Emergency strategy. At the same time, women's groups also actively propagated these narratives in their engagements with Emergency politics. These sources begin to reveal ways in which women participated in the regime, but evidence of active expressions of support cannot easily be removed from the pro-Emergency propaganda in which it appears.

¹²² Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 47.

¹²³ Banerjee, *'Make me a Man!'*, 3.

Chapter Four: Women's bodies, women's status and family planning under the Emergency

A year into the Emergency, the Congress Party hailed the government's intensification of the family planning programme as one of its greatest successes. Party President D.K. Barooah claimed that 'the most important is the family planning programme which has become an outstanding feature of the year of Emergency'.¹ Today, policies enacted under this are regarded as some of the regime's most controversial. Gandhi's Congress government did not make significant progress under the family planning programme as it so often claimed. Rather, it intensified measures aimed at population control through sterilisation, and assessed their success almost exclusively through the number of sterilisation operations performed. To do this, Central Government and state authorities set high sterilisation targets and used a catalogue of coercive and forceful measures to meet them, which sometimes violated citizens' rights.² In 1984, Veena Soni described the Emergency's policies as 'more intensive and aggressive than any other birth control programme in India' and this remains a valid claim.³

These policies continue to be the focus of intense scholarly work. Recent research enhances our understandings about both the measures enacted during 1975-1977 and their place within broader social, historical and political contexts. There can be little doubt that the Emergency's political climate, particularly its emphasis on discipline and efficiency, and the removal of critical checks and balances like the free press and vocal opposition, facilitated the government's sterilisation drive as well as its coercive implementation. In February 1976, the Congress praised the fact that 'during the past few months, several

¹ D.K. Barooah, 'A year of discipline and national consolidation' *Socialist India*, 13.5 (3 July 1976) 1-2.

² Davidson R. Gwatkin, for instance, documents the range of coercive measures employed and gives examples where authorities used physical and even police force to round up citizens for the operation. See 'Political Will and Family Planning: The Implication of India's Emergency Experience' *Population and Development Review*, 5.1 (1979) 29-59.

³ Veena Soni, 'The Development and Current Organisation of the Family Planning Programme' in Tim Dyson and Nigel Crook (eds.) *India's Demography: Essays on the Contemporary Population* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers PVT Ltd, 1984) 141.

states have announced more stringent measures to check the baby boom'. These included the Delhi Administration's decision to deny facilities like government loans, the allotment of housing, government employment and free medical treatment to 'eligible' couples; meaning couples who had more than two children and who it therefore deemed eligible for sterilisation. In its assessment of the factors that allowed for a more stringent approach, *Socialist India* underscored the absence of 'the unrestricted freedom that the vested interests used not only in criticising the government policy but even working against it'. In line with the regime's emphasis on national duty over individual rights, it also observed, 'the measures may cause some inconvenience to some people, but these are inevitable in the larger interests of the nation'. Finally, the party expressed its hope that 'other states will also sit up and act with promptness. Now is the right climate'.⁴ Although many key aspects of the regime's birth control programme were not new, the climate for such vigorous implementation was. As Davidson R Gwatkin comments, 'although the measures existed before 1975 the high level of political will necessary for their effective implementation did not'.⁵

The Shah Commission's general and state-wide reports on the family planning programme summarised its findings on how Emergency policies developed and how authorities deployed compulsion and coercive measures in their implementation. It set out instances where the intensified drive led to deaths, illness and the sterilisation of ineligible people, who did not need to undergo the operation because of their age, marital status or number of children.⁶ It also summarised cases where the range of incentives and disincentives that lay at the heart of the programme compromised people's rights and

⁴ 'Restricting the Family Size' *Socialist India*, 12.13 (28 February 1976) 1-2.

⁵ Gwatkin, 'Political Will and Family Planning', 34. This is a well-accepted distinction. Kalpana Ram underscores some fundamental continuities in state policy in this area: 'the intensive "crash" programmes; the emphasis on sterilisation as an easily administered method; the use of targets; the payment of incentives and disincentives'. 'What made 1976 different', Ram argues, 'was the application of political muscle to the fertility control programme'. See 'Rationalising Fecund Bodies: Family Planning Policy and the Modern Indian Nation State' in Margaret Jolly and Kalpana Ram (eds.) *Borders of Being: Citizenship, Fertility and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001) 86.

⁶ SCI, *Third and Final Report*, 153-207.

livelihoods. Tarlo explored people's experiences of these coercive measures in their daily lives, situating them in wider socio-economic contexts in her description of Emergency sterilisation as a 'forcible deal'. Citizens' social and economic status affected their abilities to negotiate these coercive measures, which often made the operation a pre-requisite for essential facilities like food, housing, employment and medical care.⁷

An emphasis on these wider contexts characterises recent trends in historiography on this aspect of the regime. Since its inception in 1952, India's family planning programme was intimately connected to both domestic and international development agendas. Matthew Connelly places the Emergency's birth control programme within international contexts, emphasising discourses around poverty and development, the role of international agencies and the global drive to control world population that emerged in the post-war period.⁸ Rebecca Jane Williams similarly explores the connections between the programme and the government's wider economic agenda and attacks on poverty, or the poor.⁹ The influence of these agendas reveals the importance of historicising these policies. Family planning under the Emergency, including the use of coercion, represented an intensification of various elements of existing policy rather than a sudden shift away from a previously benevolent programme. As Marika Vicziany argues, 'the Indian birth control programme was never genuinely voluntary in character' and coercion 'of one kind or another' pre-dated June 1975.¹⁰ Patrick Clibbens similarly criticises episodic narratives of this programme. He examines how long standing features including international funding, domestic support, eugenics, state-led implementation and a reward and punishment economy shaped these policies before, during and after the Emergency.¹¹

⁷ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 123.

⁸ Matthew Connelly, 'Population Control in India: Prologue to the Emergency Period' *Population and Development Review*, 32.4 (2006) 629-667; Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2008).

⁹ Williams, 'Storming the Citadels of Poverty'.

¹⁰ Marika Vicziany, 'Coercion in a Soft State: The Family Planning Programme in India Part 2: The Sources of Coercion' *Pacific Affairs*, 55.4 (1982-3) 557-592.

¹¹ Clibbens, 'The Indian Emergency', 123-192.

There is an important context that is markedly absent from this existing scholarship. Reproductive rights, women's health and the unhealthy nature of aspects of family planning and population control agendas are issues that have historically been at the forefront of the Indian women's movement.¹² These issues are critical in women's activism and feminist scholarship both in India and around the world. Ritu Menon claims that 'delinking "family planning" from population control and hitching it instead to safe contraception for women and to their reproductive health' is one of the Indian women's movement's most significant interventions; one that has had 'far reaching implications, both in policy terms and for changing the discourse on population and development itself'.¹³ Despite the importance of women's activism, experiences and gendered power relations to policies on family planning and population control, scholars have not situated the Emergency's programme in these contexts.

This chapter addresses this gap. It begins by exploring the gendered dimensions of this policy, which commentators often view as having primarily affected men and masculinity. I consider the reasons behind this and underscore the importance of redressing this imbalance, not only because women also experienced sterilisation, but because the Emergency government often drew on narratives of women's emancipation in order to justify its use of coercion. Using the archived files of the Shah Commission of Inquiry, rather than its published reports, and reading these files against the grain, the chapter then sets out several ways that we can interpolate women's experiences of the policy and its gendered implications. I analyse cases where women played critical roles in families' attempts to negotiate coercive measures. The chapter also considers the negative effects of the regime's focus on sterilisation and an enforced small family norm on the government's Mother and Child Healthcare programmes and the vulnerability of female children.

¹² The government's reliance on targets and coercion, the danger posed by contraceptive technologies to women's bodies, discrimination against female infants and the need for greater attention to women's health are among some of the issues that have been critical in organised women's activism over population control in India. For further discussion of these issues in relation to the Indian women's movement, see Gandhi and Shah, *The Issues at Stake*, 114-115.

¹³ Menon, *Making a Difference*, xv.

In much literature, and in the Emergency government's own rhetoric, the term family planning is often used to describe measures that sit more comfortably under the banner of population control. This is not specific to the Emergency and such conflation has a long history,¹⁴ but it is an important distinction. In Connelly's definition, 'the term family planning, in the sense of promoting reproductive rights means the opposite of population control'.¹⁵ A later section of this chapter interrogates the regime's claims that coercive measures to control the birth rate were critical for women's health and reproductive rights. For the purposes of this discussion then, the distinction is particularly important. This chapter refers to the Emergency's measures for bringing down the birth rate as population control rather than family planning, or as the regime's sterilisation drive, since this method was its focus. It uses the term family planning to refer to a wider, integrated approach, which the Emergency government failed to deliver.

4.1 Locating women in narratives of *nasbandi*

Tarlo found that some citizens referred to the Emergency period as *nasbandi ka vakt* (the sterilisation time) and others literally equated the word 'emergency' with the operation.¹⁶ Sterilisation, or rather vasectomy (male surgical sterilisation), has been perceived as a defining element of the regime. In his discussion of a Maharashtrian village's Emergency experience, anthropologist Lee Schlesinger describes one particular push of the programme as 'the ruthless family planning, i.e., vasectomy campaign of autumn 1976'.¹⁷ Williams writes that in some states, 'police were involved in "motivating" men to "accept" vasectomy'.¹⁸ Such comments align the Emergency's sterilisation drive exclusively with

¹⁴ Sarah Hodges comments on the blurring of the boundaries between family planning and population control measures in colonial India, observing for instance that 'by the dawn of independent India in 1947, birth control and eugenics had converged under a rubric of family planning'. See 'Towards a history of reproductive health in India' in Sarah Hodges (ed.) *Reproductive Health in India: History, Politics and controversies* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006) 2.

¹⁵ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 16.

¹⁶ Emma Tarlo, 'Body and Space in a Time of Crisis: Sterilization and Resettlement during the Emergency in Delhi' in Veena Das (ed.) *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 242.

¹⁷ Lee Schlesinger, 'The Emergency in an Indian Village' *Asian Survey*, 17.7 (1977) 640.

¹⁸ Williams, 'Storming the Citadels of Poverty', 473.

vasectomy and this association occurs frequently. Even feminist research tends to discuss the programme in terms of men's experiences and the male body. Deepa Dhanraj's documentary film *Something Like a War* examines the history of India's family planning programme and its effects on women. It exposes the programme's failures, its brutality and its inability to address issues around women's status from a feminist perspective. The film intersperses textual information with stories from a group of women, who figuratively and literally reclaim control over their own bodies by sharing their experiences of sexuality, fertility, health and family planning whilst mapping out these experiences on a female body drawn on paper. However, female bodies do not figure in the documentary's references to the Emergency. One man recalls authorities' use of force to sterilise men in his UP village, and text on the screen reveals that '6.5 million men were sterilised by the end of India's Emergency rule in 1977'.¹⁹ Another group of feminist writers discuss increases in technological interventions in fertility and over women's bodies. They foreground the long history of problematic population control policies in India, and emphasise that 'these excesses crossed their limit during the Emergency'. Although the rest of the book focuses on women's bodies and fertility from a feminist perspective, of this period the authors simply state that 'in 1976 vasectomy was performed on 6.5 million men'.²⁰

This exclusive focus on men is partly explained by the fact that statistically, they were the main recipients of operations performed under this regime. In 1975, 54% of the total sterilisations conducted across the country were vasectomies and in 1976, this increased to 75%.²¹ Northern regions of the country, states such as Bihar, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan and UP, were popularly known as the 'vasectomy belt' because of the large numbers of operations performed there.²² Officially, India's family planning programme revolved around a 'cafeteria approach', involving a selection of methods that recipients

¹⁹ Deepa Dhanraj, *Something Like a War* (1991) SPARROW.

²⁰ Chayanika, Swatija and Kamaxi, *We and our Fertility: The Politics of Technological Intervention* (Mumbai: Sundarshan Art Printing Press, 1999), 83.

²¹ Government of India, *Family Welfare Programme in India: A Yearbook, 1976-1977* (New Delhi: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 1977) 8.

²² Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 37.

could choose from including male and female sterilisation, the contraceptive pill, condoms and the IUD.²³ This ethos shaped the fifth five-year plan (1974-1978), which aimed 'to provide family planning services as part of an integrated package of health, family planning, nutrition and Mother and Child Health services at all levels'.²⁴ However, both before and during the Emergency, the government increasingly favoured sterilisation as its preferred method: 'From the government's perspective, *nasbandi* is the most cost effective method of preventing births.'²⁵ It is also permanent and yields quantitative results quickly.

Gandhi's Ministry of Health and Family Planning focused on delivering male sterilisation during the Emergency and encouraged state authorities to do the same. In the early 1970s, sterilisation camps emerged as a common way of delivering these operations on a large scale. In 2014, the deaths of eight women in a government run camp in Bilaspur District, Chhattisgarh, brought fresh scrutiny to the state's continued use of often-ill equipped camps to sterilise people, particularly women, with scant regard for their health.²⁶ In the early 1970s however, these camps were celebrated as an efficient way of carrying out large numbers of vasectomies. Maharashtra held the first mobile vasectomy camp in 1960 as part of a five-week long intensive campaign.²⁷ The District Collector and Family Planning Bureau in Ernakulam, Kerala, pioneered the approach as part of mainstream policy with a camp in December 1970, which performed 15,005 vasectomies: 'an all India record'.²⁸ A report in a publication associated with The Population Council hailed this and

²³ An intrauterine device, or coil, is a long term but reversible method of birth control, involving the implantation of a device into a woman's womb. The implementation of IUD programmes in the 1960s and 1970s in India encountered many problems, including healthcare complications for some women. See Chikako Takeshita, *The Global Biopolitics of the IUD: How Science Constructs Contraceptive Users and Women's Bodies* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 66.

²⁴ 'Family Planning in India: The Problem and its Magnitude' *WOTM* 20.3, March 1976, 10-14.

²⁵ Patricia Jeffrey, Roger Jeffrey and Andrew Lyon, *Labour Pains and Labour Power: Women and Childbearing in India* (London: Zed Books, 1989) 201.

²⁶ Anuja Jaiswall, '8 women dead, 50 hospitalized after sterilization surgery in Chhattisgarh' *Times of India* (11 November 2014) <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/8-women-dead-50-hospitalized-after-sterilization-surgery-in-Chhattisgarh/articleshow/45105930.cms> (accessed 15 November 2014); Priyanka Pulla, 'Why are Women Dying in India's Sterilisation Camps?' *The British Medical Journal* (December 2014), 349.

²⁷ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 192.

²⁸ S. Krishnakumar, 'Kerala's Pioneering Experiment in Mass Vasectomy Camps' *Studies in Family Planning*, 3.8 (August 1972) 177.

other camps like it as 'a tremendous breakthrough in India's family planning effort'.²⁹ As Connelly notes, even the earliest camps experienced many problems in regulating the nature and quality of operations performed and witnessed the kind of 'excesses' that the Emergency period later became infamous for.³⁰

Emergency authorities relied increasingly and extensively on this approach, as existing infrastructure struggled to cope with the large numbers of operations that the government's increased targets demanded. Targets were a familiar staple of the family planning programme and sterilisation drive in India but they reached hitherto unknown heights after June 1975.³¹ The resultant pressure and the extensive use of camp conditions to meet these in part explain why the Emergency government preferred vasectomy to tubectomy (surgical procedure for female sterilisation). Tubectomy operations constituted major abdominal surgery, in stark contrast to vasectomies which were minimally invasive, faster, easier to perform and required less aftercare, allowing for the discharge of most patients on the day of their operation. The Shah Commission of Inquiry's note on the implementation of the programme in Bihar observed that 'the scale at which sterilisations were performed was much beyond the capacity of hospital facilities in the state' and that 'the operation theatres at the Primary Health Centre levels or in camps left much to be

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Although the Government of India took up Kerala's example and established a national model for the creation of camps across the country, Connelly notes that 'Kerala officials themselves abandoned the approach' after discovering that 25% of those who accepted the operation were over the age of 45 and therefore ineligible for it. Early attempts to sterilise large numbers of people at a camp in UP resulted in eleven men's deaths from tetanus because of dirty instruments (Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 296). Connelly observed similar issues over mobile camps, as 'the drive to rapidly reduce fertility at minimal cost in mobile camps would make it difficult to maintain basic standards, including medical screening and sterile instruments' (192).

³¹ Quantitative data on the programme, especially for the year 1976-1977, clearly demonstrates this. 'Encouraged by the performance of the preceding year', Central Government fixed a national target of 4.3 million sterilisations (*Family Welfare Programme in India: A Yearbook, 1976-1977*, 6). The National Population Policy, announced in April 1976, set down central guidelines for the implementation of this national target, but also encouraged states to bring in their own measures. Accordingly, several states assigned themselves targets that were much higher than the ones set by the Central Government (Ibid., 6-7). Many states and union territories achieved over and above even these heightened targets. Maharashtra, Delhi, Bihar, Gujarat, Punjab, Rajasthan and Karnataka all reached over 150% of their sterilisation targets (Ibid., 82). The Central Ministry for Health and Family Planning therefore reported that it 'witnessed an extraordinary tempo in the implementation of the programme and recorded a phenomenal increase in the number of sterilisations' performed, amounting to a total of 8.26 million. This was a sharp increase from the 1.35 million achieved in 1974-5 and even the 2.67 million operations performed in 1975-6 (Ibid., 6).

desired'. It further noted, 'the deficiency was sought to be set off by shifting stress to vasectomy and avoiding tubectomy except at medical college hospitals and district hospitals'.³²

Authorities also focused many of the regime's efforts to meet these targets in male dominated work places. Most administrations across the country accepted that pressurising government servants to accept operations was both desirable and a convenient way of meeting targets. Central and state governments focused many of their incentives and disincentives in government controlled workspaces. Authorities threatened employees with job loss, suspension, loss of salary, denial of promotion and the removal of other work related benefits unless they accepted sterilisation.³³ Most incentives and disincentives also had significant economic consequences. Minister for Health and Family Planning Dr Karan Singh's National Population Policy (NPP), which formalised these measures and their intensification under the Emergency regime in April 1976, significantly increased the monetary benefits that the government offered in exchange for sterilisation. It paid between Rs. 75 and Rs. 150 to each acceptor, depending on the families' existing number of children, with the higher value offered to couples with fewer children. Sterilisation also often became a condition for facilities like ration cards, housing and free medical care.³⁴

Numerous policy documents and communications demonstrate this intensive focus on male sterilisation. After a visit to UP in September 1976, Family Planning Department Secretary *Smt* Serla Grewal noted, 'one healthy trend is that tubectomy operations are declining while vasectomy operations are on the increase', adding that they were at least five times higher. She saw this as 'the reason that despite the poor infrastructure in Uttar

³² SCI 'Background Note', 1-15, in 41011/8/78-T4 (Bihar), SCI Papers, NAI, 14.

³³ 'UP Government to withdraw concessions to staff' *The Hindu* (12 June 1976); 'Sterilisation or no pay' *Times of India* (8 March 1976).

³⁴ 'Ration cards only for three children' *The Hindu* (10 April 1976); 'Free Houses for the Sterilised' *The Hindu* (10 April 1976). At a family planning camp in Madras, the City Corporation offered sterilisation acceptors 'two days stay in the camp with all facilities of a home, a 9 kilo foodgrain packet' and an extra Rs. 60 over the usual incentive payment. 'Their children will be entitled to free medical care at Corporation health centres' and they were also given free rations of *balahar* (weaning food) for children below the age of five, 'Copter Carrying Family Planning Message' *WOTM*, 20.1 (January 1976) 13.

Pradesh...the programme has caught up. By the end of this month there is every likelihood of the state achieving its fixed target for the whole year'.³⁵ Health Officers in Maharashtra echoed this. One circular containing instructions for a month long campaign in December 1976 ordered, 'considering the total days of the campaign and the sterilisation target more emphasis should be given on vasectomy operations'.³⁶

In a similar circular to field staff, a Wardha District Health Officer despaired over its high number of tubectomies. Maharashtra's Minister for Public Health highlighted the 'very horrible state of affairs' whereby vasectomies constituted just 3% of sterilisations in that area. The officer lamented that 'because of the limited technical difficulties in the district, particularly at the peripheral level, we could not perform tubectomies in large numbers and could not organise camps very frequently'. He underscored the 'obvious' need for a focus on male sterilisation: 'You all know that vasectomy has got many advantages over tubectomy in the speedy execution of the sterilisation programme. The government is therefore very keen that the present trend should be reversed'.³⁷ An order issued in June 1976 by N.H. Kulkarni, Joint Director of the state's Family Planning Department, similarly emphasised the need to focus on vasectomy in order to meet targets. Kulkarni observed, 'during the last year's campaign some districts have organised tubectomy camps to achieve the high sterilisation target. This strategy is not however advisable and is also not favoured by the government. You are aware that even in routine tubectomy programme, serious complications and even fatalities occur in some of the cases'.³⁸

Officials at a Deputy Commissioners Conference in Haryana in July 1976 underscored the importance of this male-focus for facilitating the Emergency's intensive programme. They decided that 'regular vasectomy camps should be held in villages in every

³⁵ SCI *Third and Final Report*, 11.

³⁶ District Health Officer, Aurangabad District Maharashtra, Order PH-SAFP-75 7977 (28 November 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Maharashtra), SCI Papers, NAI.

³⁷ Government of Maharashtra, Letter from District Health Officer, Zilla Parishad Wardha, to Medical Officers (22 September 1975) File VI Zilla Parishad Wardha, SCI Papers, NAI.

³⁸ N.H. Kulkarni, Joint Director Family Planning, Government of Maharashtra, Order No. FPI/P&E/Tub/76-77 (14 June 1976) to District Health Officers, File VI Zilla Parishad Wardha, SCI Papers, NAI.

district' to sustain the programme's 'increased tempo throughout the year'.³⁹ The following month, the Government of Haryana's Finance Secretary lamented in a letter to Health Department officials that family planning performance in the state for the year so far was 'much below the mark'. He advised the Department's staff that to correct this, 'the emphasis this year is going to be on vasectomy'.⁴⁰ To this end, the Government of Haryana required all eligible government servants with three or more children to get sterilised by 31 October 1976 (later extended to 30 November), and all those with two children by 31 December 1976.⁴¹ The gendered language used within Haryana's directives demonstrates the intentional focus on vasectomy. The state government ordered that 'any eligible person who did not get *himself* sterilised will be debarred' from a range of positions and opportunities including places on boards, committees and government bodies.⁴² Authorities also reported to the Commission that in many departments, 'paybills were not passed until the eligible person got *himself* sterilised' (my emphasis).⁴³ This assumption was not confined to the Government of Haryana. A New Delhi Municipal Corporation Officer set out that only people with two children or less would be allowed medical coverage from government hospitals. The order asserted that those with more children 'will receive this free coverage only after production of sterilisation certificate from the authority prescribed in respect of the husband'.⁴⁴

Although this policy has not been analysed from a gendered perspective, much evidence already suggests that gendered identities, particularly masculinity, shaped its reception and implementation. The Government of Orissa refused to follow the Central Government and many states by targeting its employees. Towards the end of the regime,

³⁹ Government of Haryana, Minutes of Deputy Commissioner's Conference (23 July 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Haryana), SCI Papers, NAI, 37.

⁴⁰ Government of Haryana, Finance Secretary Letter No. 9239-3HBI-75/26443 (6 August 1976) File NAI 41011/8/77-T4 (Haryana), SCI Papers, NAI, 62.

⁴¹ Government of Haryana, 'Replies to Questionnaire on Family Planning', File 41011/7/88-T4 (Haryana) SCI Papers, NAI.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁴ Raj Niswas, Undated Note in 41011/8/77-T4 (Delhi), SCI Papers, NAI.

its Family Planning Department expressed frustration that it was 'high time to enforce the disincentives for government employees as a measure of family planning which has been accepted as national policy'. However, in the previous year the state's Chief Minister *Smt* Nandini Satpathy dismissed the prospect of applying pressure specifically to government servants.⁴⁵ She claimed that 'government servants represent a relatively small section of the people', and therefore targeting them would have little impact on the birth rate and would instead 'promote sorrow and regret' for those denied their usual benefits.⁴⁶ Satpathy further stated that it was undesirable to target this section of the population because 'the fact of the father being subject to certain disabilities will also have adverse effects on the children'.⁴⁷ The Chief Minister's use of the term 'disabilities' might refer to economic consequences, but it also implies physical harm and damage to the father's wellbeing, and underscores the potentially negative effects that this could have on family stability. Whilst desirable for achieving the small family, Satpathy suggested that sterilising fathers was not desirable for family norms.

This concern about the impact of sterilisation on a family was particularly gendered. A note prepared by Orissa's Family Planning Department on its tubectomy camps in 1976 observed that 'a lot of children are coming into camps with their mothers. They usually cause tension for the mother and should be kept engaged'.⁴⁸ Whilst Satpathy suggested that vasectomising fathers might have 'adverse effects on the children', officials did not show a parallel concern with children's presence in camps where tubectomies were performed on their mothers. The circular simply reminded field staff that all Primary Health Centres 'have record players which should be played' during such camps, that medical officers 'may also

⁴⁵ Government of Orissa, 'Replies to Questionnaire on Family Planning', File 41011/8/77-T4 (Orissa), SCI Papers, NAI, 18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Government of Orissa, Note on the Management of Tubectomy camps (1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Orissa), SCI Papers, NAI, 67.

supply some unbreakable toys' and that the 'female staff of the Primary Health Centre should keep watch over the children'.⁴⁹

Given the regime's focus on vasectomy, popular conceptions of the programme and the backlash against its controversial measures were also often distinctly masculinised. Numerous studies, both in the Indian context and elsewhere, demonstrate links between vasectomy and feelings of emasculation, since the operation has historically been perceived as constituting a threat to sexual functioning and, as in Satpathy's comments, family roles and norms.⁵⁰ The CSWI's research identified such sentiments. *Towards Equality* cited the case of a District Collector in Kerala, who found that when men came forward for vasectomy they 'did not want anyone to know about it and required that the operation be performed at night'.⁵¹ Authorities in Karnataka claimed that such feelings sometimes obstructed its attempts to implement the Emergency's programme. In September 1976, fieldworkers and supervisory staff reported that men were reluctant to submit themselves for vasectomy, noting that many citizens strongly believed that the men who underwent the operation 'became impotent' and 'would not be in a position to lead a happy marital life'.⁵² The state's Family Planning Department felt that this was 'to a large extent responsible for the poor response to vasectomy operations'.⁵³ Schlesinger recorded that 'the vasectomy operation is traumatic', and was often viewed by those in the Maharashtrian village he was based in 'as a radical violation of one's body and, for some, a purpose in life'.⁵⁴ He observed a sense of stigma and embarrassment around the operation and even the very issue of family planning, a sentiment that many people that Emma Tarlo spoke with also articulated. One man told her that 'a man is considered a woman after being sterilised'.⁵⁵ Tarlo observed the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ For instance, see Char et al, 'Male Perspectives on Female Sterilisation: A Community Based Study in Rural Central India' *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 35.3 (2009), 131-138.

⁵¹ CSWI, *Towards Equality*, 324.

⁵² Government of Karnataka, FPO/65-76/77 (8 September 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Karnataka), SCI Papers, NAI.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Schlesinger, 'The Emergency in an Indian Village', 641.

⁵⁵ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 172.

presence of a distinct fear, both during the Emergency period and after it, 'concentrated around the notion of lost virility and the idea that they would no longer be able to satisfy their wives'.⁵⁶

Commentators often note that these concerns regarding masculinity were at the forefront of the backlash against the Emergency. When Gandhi relaxed many of the regime's measures to facilitate elections, outrage over coercive operations spilled forth into the gaps created by relaxing censorship. Throughout this period, underground literature reported instances where citizens expressed resistance 'against the high handed and vulgar encroachment into their private lives without involving them emotionally in the campaign'.⁵⁷ Commentators widely perceive this as 'one of the most unpopular aspects of Indira Gandhi's rule' which 'resulted in her 1977 electoral defeat'.⁵⁸ Reporting on the run up to elections, *India Today* claimed that 'ironically, where the family planning programme has been the most effective are the areas where anti-government feelings run highest'.⁵⁹ The Janata Party capitalised on this discontent and demands for unrestricted civil liberties and denunciations of forced sterilisations constituted 'the entire substance' of its campaign.⁶⁰ One report claimed that 'the "Janata wave" has been strengthened in Uttar Pradesh over the past ten days...Congressmen are finding it hard to counter the Janata Party propaganda that if the Congress is returned to power *nasbandi* will be intensified'.⁶¹ Another described the election in Haryana as a 'referendum on family planning' and claimed that 'all would

⁵⁶ Ibid., 173.

⁵⁷ 'Waves of resistance against family planning drive' *Satya Samachar* (26 September 1976), Subject File 315, JP Papers, NMML, 335. The underground publication reported 'violent clashes' in several small towns in Uttar Pradesh (336).

⁵⁸ James Chadney, 'Family Planning: India's Achilles Heel?' in Yogendra Kumar Malik and Dharendra Kumar Vajpeyi (eds.) *India: The Years of Indira Gandhi* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988) 84. This perception proliferates across accounts of the Emergency. *India Today* foregrounded sterilisation in its coverage of the election campaigns, asserting that 'for the first time, rural areas have become politically conscious. Forcible sterilisations have made them see red. If this feeling is reflected in their voting, the Congress should be in serious trouble', 'Madhya Pradesh: Congress Comfort' *India Today* (16 March 1977) 17. Tariq Ali argues that sterilisation and urban clearance programmes were 'the two measures which roused the cumulative anger of the people to the point of active resistance'. See *The Nehrus and the Gandhis*, 189.

⁵⁹ 'The Opposition: Back in Business' *India Today* (28 February 1977) 9.

⁶⁰ Ali, *The Nehrus and the Gandhis*, 195.

⁶¹ 'Anti-Vasectomy Wave in UP' *Statesman Weekly* (12 March 1977).

support the Janata Party for this, if nothing else, the people said'.⁶² That conceptions of masculinity were crucial in expressions of this discontent is evidenced by the notorious slogan, '*Indira hatao indiri bachao*': 'abolish Indira and save your penis'.⁶³

Because of the intensity of this antagonism sterilisation, especially vasectomy, became taboo in the Emergency's aftermath. The Janata administration changed the Department of Family Planning's name to the Department of Family Welfare, reflecting its attempts to shake off controversial Emergency measures and their legacies. It underscored the programme's voluntary nature and between 1977 and 1978, the number of sterilisations performed dropped to 1 million.⁶⁴ Commenting on the situation almost a decade later, one journalist asserted that ever since the 'political debacle in 1977...the very word "vasectomy" seems to have been depleted from newspeak and family planning vocabulary'.⁶⁵ Discussing their fieldwork in the early 1980s, Patricia Jeffrey, Roger Jeffrey and Andrew Lyon describe how health professionals 'are now under particular pressure to find female cases, because of men's hostility to the family planning programme'.⁶⁶ The Emergency's controversial measures and the advent of laparoscopic sterilisation for women, a much less invasive technique, meant that after 1977 women emerged as the primary targets and recipients of India's family planning and sterilisation policies. Alaka Basu highlighted that from the programme's inception in 1952 up until 1977, vasectomies largely outweighed the number of tubectomies performed across the country, as shown in table 4.1. In 1973 and 1974 tubectomy numbers rose, but this retreated during the Emergency years. However, after 1977, female sterilisation began to account unequivocally for the vast majority of operations performed.⁶⁷

⁶² "Referendum on Family Planning in Haryana' *Statesman Weekly* (5 March 1977).

⁶³ Klieman, 'Indira's India', 255.

⁶⁴ V.A. Pai Panandiker and P.K. Umashankar, 'Fertility Control and Politics in India' *Population and Development Review*, 20 Supplement (1994) 91.

⁶⁵ Vimal Balasubramaniam, 'Don't Babies have Fathers?' *Indian Express* (17 November 1985).

⁶⁶ Jeffrey, Jeffrey and Lyon, *Labour Pains and Labour Power*, 202.

⁶⁷ Alaka M. Basu, 'Family Planning under Emergency: An Unanticipated Consequence' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20.10 (1985) 423.

Year	Total Sterilisations	Percentage of Tubectomies to Total
1966-67	887,368	11.5
1967-68	1,839,811	10.4
1968-69	1,664,817	16.9
1969-70	1,422,118	25.8
1970-71	1,329,914	33.9
1971-72	2,187,336	25.9
1972-73	3,121,856	16.3
1973-74	942,402	57.2
1974-75	1,353,859	54.7
1975-76	2,668,754	46.1
1976-77	8,261,173	25.0
1977-78	948,769	80.2
1978-79	1,483,907	73.7
1979-80	1,777,924	73.4
1980-81	2,052,770	78.6
1981-82	2,792,374	79.5

Table 4.1: Sterilisation operations performed and percentage of tubectomies, 1966-82⁶⁸

This shift has created a dominant perception that the Emergency functioned as a turning point when the focus of family planning and population control programmes shifted from India's men to women. Kalpana Ram states, 'it is important to bear in mind that the same coercive strategies applied since the Emergency in relation to poor women were pursued in the sterilisation of men before the Emergency'.⁶⁹ Mary E. John and Janaki Nair similarly observe that statistics on sterilisations indicate 'a massive switch from men to women following the Emergency'.⁷⁰ *Something Like a War* tells us that 'the political fallout from vasectomy abuses led to Mrs Gandhi's electoral defeat. The focus of the programme shifted to women'.⁷¹ This dominant narrative has eclipsed women's experiences of sterilisation before this defeat, and during the Emergency, from view and from scholarly attention. This thesis's first chapter highlighted how the limited focus of the Shah Commission of Inquiry's published reports also contributed to this marginalisation.

⁶⁸ Data taken from Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ram, 'Rationalising Fecund bodies' 110

⁷⁰ Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, 'Introduction' in Mary E. John and Janaki Nair (eds.) *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economies of Modern India* (New Delhi: Zed Books, 2000) 20.

⁷¹ Dhanraj, *Something Like a War*.

The government's focus on vasectomies during this period and in this documentation does not warrant the almost total disregard for women's experiences of this policy or its gendered implications. In some regions, the attempt to focus on vasectomy over tubectomy was not successful. The Government of Maharashtra was one of several administrations that processed legislation for the use of compulsion in its sterilisation drive.⁷² It introduced the Maharashtra Family (Restriction on Size) Bill into the state's Legislative Assembly on 30 March 1976. The bill 'prescribed compulsory sterilisation of males who have not completed fifty-five years and females who have not completed forty-five years and who have the prescribed number of children, which will be determined from time to time by the government'. Violation of the bill was a penal offence, punishable by up to two years imprisonment.⁷³ On 21 July 1976, the Legislative Assembly passed the Bill and it awaited approval from the Government of India.⁷⁴

Later in his statements before the Shah Commission, Dr Karan Singh pointed to such state level initiatives in his defence of and denials about the Emergency's institution of compulsive measures that breached human and reproductive rights. He highlighted that under the NPP, 'incentives and disincentives were left to the discretion of individual states', as was the question of compulsion.⁷⁵ However this policy, and other statements from his Ministry and Central Government, unequivocally sanctioned states to formalise a range of

⁷² Speaking in the *Lok Sabha* in March 1976 in anticipation of announcing the National Population Policy the following month, Minister for Health and Family Planning Dr Karan Singh said that 'the state governments of Maharashtra, Haryana and Punjab had expressed themselves in favour of compulsory sterilisation', 'No decision yet on law to control family size' *The Hindu* (20 March 1976). Punjab Health Minister Babbir Singh announced that the government had finalised a bill under which 'the addition of a third child will become a penal offence punishable by fine and imprisonment', 'Punjab to bar third child' *The Hindu* (20 March 1976.) In the same month at a press conference, Haryana's Chief Minister announced that under the bill proposed by his administration 'the birth of a third child would result in a fine of Rs. 2000 with compulsory sterilisation of parents', 'Haryana proposes fine for third child' *The Hindu* (27 March 1976). Other media articles reported that Maharashtra, West Bengal and Rajasthan also favoured compulsory sterilisation. See 'Two states favour compulsory sterilisation' *Times of India* (1 March 1976); 'Sterilisation: Rajasthan Plan' *The Hindu* (17 April 1976).

⁷³ 'Bill for compulsory sterilisation in Maharashtra' *The Hindu* (3 April 1976).

⁷⁴ 'Maharashtra Bill on Sterilisation' *The Hindu* (27 July 1976); Government of Maharashtra, The Maharashtra Family (Restriction on Size) Bill, File 427, Asok Mitra Private Papers, NMML.

⁷⁵ Public Hearing: Statement of Dr Karan Singh, File 31024/87/78-Coord/SCI, SCI, Ministry of Home Affairs, NAI, 3-5.

compulsive measures.⁷⁶ The NPP encouraged them to introduce incentives and disincentives in a 'bold and imaginative manner',⁷⁷ and Singh claimed that 'it is clear that public opinion is now ready to accept much more stringent measures for family planning than before'.⁷⁸ Further, he explicitly encouraged states to institute compulsion: 'Where a state legislature...decided the time is ripe and necessary to pass legislation for compulsory sterilisation, it may do so.' In fact, Singh insisted that the primary reason that Central Government had not instituted this legislation was because of the inability of the 'administrative and medical infrastructure in many parts of the country to cope with the vast implications of nationwide compulsory sterilisation'.⁷⁹ Despite these sanctions, Central Government hastily returned Maharashtra's Bill shortly after Gandhi announced elections early in 1977, as part of its wider withdrawal, and even denial, of these previous sanctions for compulsion.⁸⁰

Although this bill was never formally approved and enforced, orders issued by Maharashtra state authorities throughout 1976 reflect a mentality that accepted

⁷⁶ In a note to the Prime Minister on 10 October 1975, Singh reflected on population size and measures to tackle it. He asserted that 'the problem is now so serious that there seems to be no alternative but to think in terms of the introduction of some element of compulsion in the larger national interest' (SCI, 'Implementation of the Family Planning Programme: Summary', File VI/11034/80/56 (304), SCI Papers, NAI, 2). Elsewhere he claimed that 'the present Emergency, and the declaration of the twenty-point economic programme by the Prime Minister, have provided an atmosphere for tackling the problem' (Ibid., 3). Gandhi regularly echoed this emphasis on stringent measures for family planning in the context of the Emergency regime. Addressing a conference of the Association of Physicians on 22 January 1976, for instance, she declared that 'we must now act decisively to bring down the birth rate' and 'should not hesitate to take steps which might be described as drastic' (Qtd. in Williams, *Storming the Citadels of Poverty*, 485).

⁷⁷ Karan Singh, Ministry of Health and Family Planning, *National Population Policy Statement* (New Delhi, April 1976), 21. File India 113: Christian Medical Association of India Family Planning Programme, CA3/A/PAC 66 SOAS.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ On 18 February 1977, Gandhi issued a note to the Central Health and Family Planning Department underscoring the voluntary nature of the programme, especially in the context of elections: 'we are receiving letters that unless the orders issues by several governments/public agencies making sterilisation a conditions for availing facilities, in the case of those with two children or more, are withdrawn immediately, people will not believe the announcements/manifesto.' At this critical point prior to elections, Gandhi and other family planning officials distanced themselves from controversial coercive measures and advocated voluntary co-operation with the programme instead. In order to 'counter propaganda regarding credibility', Gandhi instructed state governments to retract any orders that made sterilisation a pre-requisite for availing facilities and returned Maharashtra's Bill to the State Government. Her emphasis on credibility and reference to the manifesto indicate that this shift in policy was a political move made in light of the impending elections. See SCI, 'Implementation of the Family Planning Programme: Summary', 14.

compulsion and an assumption that the bill would be passed. For instance, the state government instructed authorities to hastily conduct a survey of eligible couples in several districts and for this to be ready for ‘*when* the bill for compulsory sterilisation is enacted and brought into force’, so that they would have updated information to act on (my emphasis).⁸¹ A meeting of the state’s Family Planning Department’s key personnel in the same month set out various plans for improving infrastructure ‘in view of the bill for compulsory sterilisation likely to be enacted in November 1976’.⁸² Unlike in the ‘vasectomy belt’ of northern India, women were the main recipients of sterilisations in this region during the Emergency. In one of his fortnightly reports to the President of India, the state’s Governor recorded that out of the 60,731 operations performed between April and June 1976, just 16,027 of these were vasectomies compared with 44,704 tubectomies.⁸³

This chapter now turns to consider the gendered power relations within which some of these Emergency tubectomies were performed, before moving to discuss other gendered implications of the regime’s measures in terms of women’s health and status. Tarlo’s ethnographic study is unique in its inclusion of some women’s narratives about their Emergency experiences. At times, particularly in her discussion of the infamous demolitions and sterilisations at Delhi’s Turkman Gate in 1976, Tarlo also begins to interrogate the gendered construction of these narratives.⁸⁴ My analysis extends these few references and demonstrates that a close reading of the Shah Commission’s archived files offers further glimpses of women’s experiences of this policy and allows us to interrogate its gendered

⁸¹ Joint Director, Health and Family Planning Department, Government of Maharashtra, Circular No. FPL/P&E-VII/Eligible-Couple-Survey (16 June 1976) SCI Papers, File 41011/8/77-T4 (MHR), NAI.

⁸² ‘Family Planning Programme, 1976-1977’, Minutes of a meeting of Chief Education Officers, Deans, Civil Surgeons and Medical Officers in the Health and Family Department, Government of Maharashtra (27 & 28 June 1976) SCI Papers, 41011/8/77-T4 (MHR), NAI.

⁸³ Governor Ali Yavar Jung, Fortnightly Report to the President of India (July 1976) Governor’s Reports, Raj Bhavan Library Mumbai, File 1029, 1-4.

⁸⁴ The demolition of homes in the Turkman Gate area of Old Delhi in April 1976 is one of the most infamous incidents of Emergency repression. Homes were demolished without adequate warning and police fired on protestors who tried to halt the demolitions. Both authorities’ attempts to relocate residents and people’s resistance to these measures were also connected to a local family planning clinic operating at nearby Dujana House. Tarlo reproduces a number of women’s comments on this and other resettlements, highlighting the gendered dynamics present, as ‘whilst most women recalled feeling stranded without their husbands, many men expressed a feeling of helplessness about their inability to protect their women, children and homes’ (*Unsettling Memories*, 138).

nature. My approach does not intend to marginalise men's experiences of these measures in any way. It is also important to situate coerced vasectomies in the context of gendered identities and power relations, and the entanglement of Emergency experiences with masculine identities is already evident across existing scholarship. Instead, this chapter opens up a space to articulate a different narrative, one that has previously been ignored in part because of this dominance of masculinity, and in turn work towards a fuller history of this particular Emergency policy.

4.2 'My wife had to get sterilised': Women's roles in negotiating coercion

As implementing agencies pressurised families to accept sterilisation on the Emergency's terms within existing patriarchal structures, this pressure often reinforced gendered biases and inequalities. Tarlo notes that whilst in many cases men accepted the forcible deal, 'at other times it was women who had the operation, either because their husbands were unwilling...or because they wanted to preserve the strength of the family breadwinner'.⁸⁵ Faced with the Emergency's threats, compulsion and coercive incentives and disincentives, many families accepted sterilisation only through women's bodies. Both narratives where such a decision appears to have come from men and where women volunteered to undergo the operation in order to protect their husbands demonstrate underlying assumptions about women's subordinate position within the family; assumptions which shaped the implementation and reception of this policy.

In May 1976, women's magazine *Femina* produced a special issue dedicated to 'facts you should know about sterilisation'. This debated aspects of the Emergency's programme, particularly compulsion,⁸⁶ and set out to educate its female readership about

⁸⁵ Ibid., 171.

⁸⁶ *Femina, Special: Facts you should know about sterilisation*, 17.21 (21 May 1976). The articles featured in this special issue displayed a range of perspectives, including detailed explorations of arguments for and against compulsion. A piece by Malini Karkal, reader at the Institute for Population Studies in Mumbai, set out the various health hazards resulting from overpopulation. Karkal argued that 'a measure such as compulsory sterilisation of the higher parity couples which the Government of Maharashtra is planning, should therefore, definitely be considered a positive measure in the direction of reducing infant, maternal and general mortality ('Good Health: the first casualty of

sterilisation operations. One article, written as a series of questions and answers with two doctors, described in detail and with images the procedures for tubectomy and vasectomy and noted their benefits, side effects and necessary aftercare.⁸⁷ Under a subheading 'vasectomy versus tubectomy', the doctors stated that 'medically, everything points towards a vasectomy. It is simpler, faster, and less expensive'. However they also observed that 'personally, it's a situation of the individual temperaments of the husband and the wife', and 'the mother who bears the full brunt of pregnancy and childrearing is far more responsive and accommodating, while the man is likely to think of sterilisation more as a threat to his manliness rather than a deliverance from unwanted babies'.⁸⁸ An article published in *India Today* in 1976, which argued for a cafeteria approach, similarly noted that 'it is both simpler and time saving for men to get operated'. However, it insisted that 'here lies the next hurdle in the path of sterilisation. Men with their inflated ego prefer their women to get sterilised....there are however family planning officials who go to villages and instigate women to put their foot down and demand that their husband get sterilised'.⁸⁹

Some of Tarlo's conversations with Welcome colony residents demonstrate this. One rickshaw driver recalled his experience, where authorities pressured him to get sterilised, provide a case (i.e. pay someone else to accept sterilisation) or pay damages. He stated, 'we could not afford to pay for a case so my wife had to get sterilised'.⁹⁰ Another man described the pressure that staff at a private nursing home placed on him when they admitted his pregnant wife for delivery: 'for two days, they were after me, trying to get me to go for the operation, so I told them I was ill. So then they made me sign a form and

overpopulation, 23). Other pieces in this issue, however, made a case against compulsion. A letter to the editor asserted that the use of compulsion 'strikes at the very foundation of democracy and infringes upon the dignity of the individual, reducing people to the level of animals' (Indu K. Malla, Letter to the Editor, 5). One article depicted the negative consequences of some of the Emergency's measures, such as workers agitating after being refused resources unless they get sterilised, and argued that stimulating production and reducing poverty would bring down the birth rate faster (Khalid Mohammed and Prema Viswanathan, 'What are the alternatives?', 29). Another article argued that without adequate healthcare for existing children and mothers, compulsory sterilisation 'may be just a shortcut to solve a present crisis' (Dr Gieve Patel, 'We can do without compulsory sterilisation', 27).

⁸⁷ Nina Verma, 'Facts you should know about sterilisation', *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ 'Needed Cafeteria Approach' *India Today* (15 March 1976) 13.

⁹⁰ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 165.

sterilised my wife.’ This man was able to evade the operation and negotiate the forcible deal only by accepting sterilisation for his wife instead. He added that she ‘never fully recovered [from the procedure]. She still gets a problem with swelling.’⁹¹

Many of the cases that came before the Shah Commission and are recorded in its archived files attest to this kind of negotiation. Its collection of notes on family planning excesses in Maharashtra contain the case of *Shri* J.S. Katib, an employee of the Dhule District Municipal Committee. In 1976, the Committee’s President gave Katib the choice to accept sterilisation or have his contract ‘terminated’. The report noted, ‘he was unwilling to get himself terminated. However, he would get his wife operated on after her delivery which was due shortly.’⁹² The investigating officer’s use of the word ‘terminated’ to refer simultaneously to Katib’s employment and reproductive capacity equates the two, emphasising the difficulty of the choice that he faced. Unwilling to subject himself to ‘termination’ in either sense, *Shri* Katib put his wife forward for sterilisation instead. B. K. Boohare, a teacher from Buldhana District, faced a similar threat: ‘he was not willing to get sterilised. He was therefore placed under suspension’. His employers subsequently issued a notice stating that if this teacher failed to get sterilised within ten days then they would terminate his services and so ‘on receipt of the notice he got his wife operated on for tubectomy’.⁹³ In both of these cases, women enabled their husbands to negotiate the impositions of their government employers, although for *Shri* Boohare this negotiation was only partly successful. Authorities initially reinstated the teacher after his wife underwent the operation, only to insist that unless he provided a further two cases for sterilisation by March 1977, his period of suspension would be treated as leave without pay. In both of these instances, complaints were filed to the Commission exclusively in the husbands’ names, demonstrating the grievance only in the context of its effects on them and their employment. The Commission condemned their employers’ actions under the Emergency. Neither the

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹² ‘Excesses in the Implementation of the Family Planning Programme in Maharashtra’, File 41011/8/77-T4, SCI Papers, NAI, 2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

Government of Maharashtra nor the Shah Commission of Inquiry attended to the victimised position of these men's wives.

The Commission's note on the programme's implementation in Karnataka highlighted the case of *Shri* Chandranath, Head Master of a government primary school in Bidar District. State authorities reported that 'he was forced to undergo family planning operation' by the Education Department. Officials from this department 'issued orders relieving him from duty compulsorily directing him to produce necessary sterilisation certificate before he could be allowed to join duty'. The Commission's report stated that 'it was only when he got his wife sterilised that he was taken back on duty'.⁹⁴ The Commission also unearthed a range of evidence to support this case: the Education Department dismissed *Shri* Chandranath on 9 September 1976, his wife underwent a tubectomy three days later and authorities reinstated him via a written order on 20 September. Again, the report brought the victimisation of *Smt* Chandranath before the Commission only as evidence that her husband was coerced.

In Delhi, police pressured rickshaw puller *Shri* Suresh Chand to accept sterilisation or pay damages, and so he put his wife forward for the operation in September 1976.⁹⁵ Like the teacher from Buldhana District in the Commission's report on Maharashtra, this negotiation was not entirely successful, and *Shri* Chand was also sterilised in December 1976.⁹⁶ Cases where authorities sterilised both husband and wife underscore the detachment of the Emergency's target driven sterilisation programme from actual family planning. The Commission's Delhi Fact Finding Committee also reported the case of *Smt* Shanti Devi, a police constable's wife. The constable's superiors insisted that he get sterilised or pay market rent on his government accommodation and lose other employment

⁹⁴ Government of Karnataka, 'Implementation of Family Planning Programme in Karnataka State During the Emergency – Alleged Excesses', File 41011/8/77-T4 (Karnataka Vol I), SCI Papers, NAI, 33.

⁹⁵ Government of India, 'Report of the Fact Finding Committee Relating to the Implementation of the Family Planning Programme in the Union Territory of Delhi During the Emergency', File 577 Asok Mitra Private Papers, NMML, 77.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

allowances. The report reads, 'the last warning was given to him on 9 September. He admitted his wife to Willingdon Hospital on 13 September 1976 and on the same day the operation was performed'.⁹⁷ The report presents the transition from the threat to the submission of this man's wife as seamless. *Smt* Devi died in the days following the operation because of an infection. The gynaecologist told the Fact Finding Committee that 'proper screening was not possible in the rush' in which authorities admitted her for the operation.⁹⁸

The Shah Commission collected individual testimonies and conducted hearings with key personnel as well as collating this evidence from state authorities. Testimonies from government workers and those involved in the implementation of the sterilisation drive tended, unsurprisingly, to adopt a defensive tone. As horror stories and the extent of the programme's impact on human and reproductive rights emerged, many individuals emphasised the minor roles that they played, citing the general climate of fear instituted by the Emergency and asserting that they were also victims of the state's pressure and coercion. The complex position of the Emergency's 'victims turned agents' is something that Tarlo considers at length.⁹⁹ One testimony of a Delhi Transport Corporation employee illuminates this position and is particularly interesting for this discussion about the role of women in negotiating coercive measures. In his testimony, Security Officer *Shri* G.S. Alluwalia revealed that under orders from the Corporation's Chairman, there was a general directive to improve discipline in the force and get all eligible staff sterilised by the target date. 'Accordingly', Alluwalia recalled, he suspended a number of officers and 'issued general instructions for the eligible staff to get themselves sterilised'.¹⁰⁰ He also informed the Commission that initially, 'considering the human aspect of the whole issue I was on the contrary not hard on my staff'.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁹⁹ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 178-201.

¹⁰⁰ G. S. Alluwalia, 'Statement: Family Planning in Delhi Transport Corporation', Serial No 1241, Family Planning in DTC, SCI Papers, NAI, 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2.

However, after facing pressure from his own superiors he changed his approach, recording that 'I did persuade them and in certain cases force them also to achieve the targets as I was being pressured.'¹⁰² Although an agent of the Emergency's coercive measures, Alluwalia simultaneously occupies a victimised subject position as he also faced pressure under the regime. Responding to a specific allegation against him made by security guard Himmat Singh, Alluwalia attempted to demonstrate his leniency by outlining his efforts to open up an alternative outcome for the employee: 'As far as I remember I asked him to get himself sterilised. When he showed inability, I asked him to get his wife sterilised. His case was closed when he gave an undertaking that he will get his wife sterilised before 15 September 1976.'¹⁰³ His creation of this new option in the 'forcible deal' forms an integral part of Alluwalia's defence.

Through close readings of the Commission's archived files and these often-brief references to complainant's wives, it is possible to isolate examples where women were crucial to families' attempts to negotiate the Emergency's pressure to get sterilised. It is difficult to speculate about the scale of these kinds of negotiations. However, references to such practices in official orders indicate common occurrence. In Haryana, a Health Department Secretary circulated a letter to all staff in October 1976, detailing some of the grounds on which people attempted to evade sterilisation operations. The Secretary recorded that numerous departments had forwarded representations 'from certain government employees working under them seeking exemption from sterilisation on some pretext or other'.¹⁰⁴ Despite the Secretary's dismissive tone, many of these 'pretexts' were actually valid objections, largely centred on employees' wives. Most complained that they did not need to undergo vasectomy since their wives were nearing the upper age limit of the state's eligibility criteria (forty-five) or because their wives were menopausal. The Department's response to these objections indicates a detachment from family planning in

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁴ Secretary to the Health Department, Government of Haryana, Letter No. 8102-7HBII-76/34387 (20 October 1976) File 41011/8/78-T4 (Haryana), SCI Papers, NAI.

favour of quantitative sterilisations, as the Secretary insisted that 'the State Government has no intention of making any relaxation of the present policy' and confirmed that authorities would only consider objections on medical grounds.¹⁰⁵

The Secretary also reported that 'in some cases, applications have been forwarded to the department in which eligible government servants have offered to get their wives sterilised'. It appears significant that the Secretary chose to treat applications under this category individually, set apart from the list of other 'pretexts', perhaps suggesting that they occurred regularly. The Department noted:

Government have considered this question and decided that such tubectomies may be performed before the due date fixed for the government servant for sterilisation and a certificate of that effect be submitted to the controlling officer. In case this is not done for any reason whatsoever before the due date then the permission to allow the tubectomy of the wife will only be given if the husband is medically unfit for vasectomy.¹⁰⁶

Another letter by this state's Finance Secretary, outlining the stringent measures aimed at increasing the number of sterilisations performed, underscored that 'the emphasis this year is going to be on vasectomy'.¹⁰⁷ The Secretary, however, also stated that 'of course, if...[the] spouse gets sterilised, there would be no need for the government servant to also undergo any operation'.¹⁰⁸ Such directives created opportunities for families to negotiate who would accept the imposition of the Emergency's sterilisation programme. Although government servants could defer the pressure to get sterilised onto their spouses, the Finance Secretary's letter insisted that 'no government servant will be granted exemption from sterilisation operation merely because his/her spouse has had an IUD insertion or claims the use of condoms'. This demonstrates a complete disregard for family planning in favour of achieving quantitative targets for sterilisation.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Government of Haryana, Finance Secretary Letter No. 9239-3HBI-75/26443 to the Health Department (6 August 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Haryana), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Because of the limited information collected by the Commission and the necessity of reading these instances against the grain to access a glimpse of women's experiences, it is often difficult to ascertain whether these decisions were reached solely by the husbands in question (whose name the complaints and testimonies were usually filed in) or as a family. The letter sent by Haryana's Health Secretary suggests a distinct lack of agency for the women involved. 'Permission' for the tubectomy, according to this letter, could be applied for by the male government servant and granted by state authorities. There is no mention of decisions, applications or permissions from women themselves. Research on fertility, family relations and women's status in India more broadly often emphasises women's lack of agency in such negotiations. Jeffrey, Jeffrey and Lyon observe that 'I shall have my wife sterilised' was a commonly heard phrase in the villages they studied,¹¹⁰ given that 'an essential component of husband's rule is sexual power over his wife...additionally, he has rights over his wife's childbearing capacity'.¹¹¹

Some examples suggest that women played a more assertive role in such decision-making or that some women desired the operation and welcomed the institution of more stringent measures. *India Today's* feature on people's perceptions of the policy included the reflections of Dhanno, a housewife who accepted sterilisation after eleven children and was the first woman in her village to do so. She revealed that she was 'sick and tired of the old routine' of childbearing and childrearing, and so she signed up to receive the operation in the face of stiff opposition from her husband: 'He grumbled like mad when he had to sign the papers but the doctors finally persuaded him.'¹¹² A piece on people's perceptions of compulsory sterilisation published in *Femina* cited both positive and negative consequences of this policy from women's perspectives. One woman whose husband refused to undergo the operation but 'never has a job for more than two months' to support his existing three

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey, Jeffrey and Lyon, *Labour Pains*, 203.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹² 'What people say' *India Today* (15 March 1976) 16.

children, insisted 'I am glad the government is going to pass a law. Then my husband will have to be sterilised.'¹¹³

One middle aged woman, whose husband worked as a *coolie* (labourer) at Old Delhi Railway station, told Tarlo about the pressure that his employers placed on the family: 'if we didn't get sterilised or give a case then our homes would be demolished...I decided that since my husband did heavy work, I would be the one to have the operation.'¹¹⁴ Bubul Sharma described her decision to accept sterilisation after the delivery of her second child in September 1976 to *India Today* and claimed, 'it is easiest for the woman to have herself sterilised at the time of childbirth and since that is the case, I don't see why my husband should go through it unnecessarily.'¹¹⁵ She also asserted that many Indian men 'are terribly selfish and egotistic about childbearing. Sterilisation strikes them, even when applied to their wives, as an insult to their capacity to produce children or an offense to their virility.'¹¹⁶ Other remarks that Tarlo recorded showed that the pressure for women to accept the operation came from all sides. One man informed her that 'those wives who do not care for their husbands prefer their husbands to go' and another elderly woman reported that 'women used to mock men who had been sterilised'.¹¹⁷ Fixed notions about appropriate gendered roles shaped people's attitudes towards sterilisation and these notions came from both men and women. Although the case of the *coolie's* wife demonstrates this woman's primary role in making the decision about who would accept the Emergency's 'forcible deal', it also speaks to wider issues about the value of women's work and unequal gendered power relations, particularly given the relative ease and short recovery time of vasectomy compared with tubectomy.

All of the testimonies collected by the Shah Commission show that women's voices were distinctly absent from the processes of documenting and compensating for coercive

¹¹³ Dolly Thakore, 'What the people have to say' *Femina, Special Issue: Facts you should know about sterilisation*, 17.21 (21 May 1976) 33.

¹¹⁴ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 164.

¹¹⁵ 'What people say' *India Today* (15 March 1976) 13.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories* 172.

sterilisation. Reports from state authorities, individual testimonies and the Commission's notes on these focused explicitly and almost exclusively on the coercive measures faced by male complainants, although when read closely the archived files reveal that women often played important roles in families' attempts to negotiate Emergency coercion. In her conceptualisation of sterilisation under the regime as a 'forcible deal', Tarlo explained that whilst the government's array of measures were repressive and arguably forceful, 'in accepting it, they [people] were accepting a deal which, like any other deal, implied an element of participation'.¹¹⁸ Tarlo also underscored that the nature of the deal 'depended largely on where one was placed in the social system', referring particularly to socio-economic status.¹¹⁹ Fixed notions about appropriate gendered roles also played a part in determining the nature of this deal, as the subordinate position of women within the social system and the family at times provided the platform from which negotiations with Emergency authorities could take place.

4.3 Mother and Child Healthcare under the Emergency

Maithreyi Krishna Raj writes that 'the saga of coercive family planning programmes, of harmful contraceptives and the indifference to women's health has an extensive literature'.¹²⁰ However, this scholarship does not explore the impact of the Emergency's coercive programmes on women's health. Mother and Child Healthcare (MCH) schemes fall under the umbrella of India's family planning programme. During the Emergency, government discourse on these schemes often rendered them as supplementary to the main goal of bringing down the birth rate through targeted sterilisations: 'As might have been anticipated, the rest of the "integrated" programme fell by the wayside when the whole government was incentivised to sterilise.'¹²¹ In its reflections on the programme in 1975-76,

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 123.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 149.

¹²⁰ Maithreyi Krishna Raj, 'A Gender Critique of Economic Theories of Population' in Maithreyi Krishna Raj, Ratna M. Sudarshan, Abusaleh Shariff (eds.) *Gender, Population and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 18-43.

¹²¹ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 323.

the Central Government's Family Planning Department stated that 'MCH activities constitute an important component of the family planning programme, as proper integration of the two programmes ensures the better acceptance of the latter by way of assuring the health and longevity of the children already born and of mothers'.¹²² The Department accorded MCH importance only as far as it ensured the 'better acceptance' of birth control measures. In the context of the Emergency's pressurised drive to reach sterilisation targets, this perspective became increasingly apparent. In the Department's assessment of the programme the following year, it reported that targets for schemes under MCH, including measures related to the nutrition and immunisation programmes, 'could not be reached'.¹²³

Government cited the unavailability of several vaccines as the reason for this failure to reach targets. However, a number of directives issued in early 1977, which underscored the need to re-dress this by paying greater attention to MCH, suggest that it was also due to a lack of effort, or what Gwatkin terms 'political will', on this front in the previous Emergency months.¹²⁴ The Government of Bihar issued an order on 21 January 1977, which said of MCH measures: 'this programme has not been given due importance. Efforts should be made to ensure that MCH services including distribution of vitamin A, iron and folic acid tablets and nutritional inputs under various schemes are made available to the largest number of children and mothers.'¹²⁵ Similarly, at a conference of Health Department staff in Karnataka, the state's Director of Health and Family Planning services observed that 'the progress under sterilisation operations was satisfactory, but the MCH programme lagged behind and would have to be geared up'.¹²⁶ A Union Secretary for Health and Family planning also noted that 'MCH services form the basis for success in family planning. In our

¹²² *Family Welfare in India: A Yearbook, 1975-1976* (New Delhi: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 1976) 8.

¹²³ *Family Welfare in India: A Yearbook, 1976-1977*, 13.

¹²⁴ Gwatkin, 'Political Will and Family Planning'.

¹²⁵ Government of Bihar, Order 324 FP (25 January 1977) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Bihar), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹²⁶ Government of Karnataka, 'Proceedings of the Conference of Regional Directors of Health and Family Planning (1 February 1977) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Karnataka), SCI Papers, NAI.

anxiety to push the programme for sterilisation, MCH service seems to be getting neglected.’¹²⁷

The implementation of vaccine programmes was especially hampered by the Emergency’s focus on coercive sterilisation and the subsequent fear of health authorities among citizens. Underground literature referenced an incident where ‘in a small town in UP, a scare went round that the vaccine being administered to the children in the schools would make them sterile. A policeman hurried out of his uniform, put on civilian clothes and rushed to the school to save his child from such a fate. A near stampede took place in the town.’¹²⁸ A few days later, the LSS reported, an item appeared in Bihar newspaper *Searchlight* adding to the fears by quoting an American obstetrician discussing experimental work on contraceptive injections for women. The bulletin stated, ‘with scenes like this going on in smaller towns and villages, people will be wary of getting their children vaccinated, even when there is an epidemic’.¹²⁹ Gandhi described this incident and the rumours that ensued as evidence that ‘some political groups tried to take advantage and misrepresent the family planning programme. Recently, a scare was created in Delhi when triple antigen inoculations were sought to be given to school children against whooping cough.’¹³⁰ *Socialist India* recorded Gandhi’s assertion that ‘it was the duty of the state to look after the health of the people especially those belonging to the children of the weaker sections. The government decided to inoculate children against certain diseases but mischief mongers spread a canard that the children were being sterilised.’¹³¹

Journalists John Dayal’s and Ajoy Bose’s narrative account of Delhi’s Emergency experience depicts several scenarios in which women’s health was directly neglected as a result of the regime’s focus of resources and intent on sterilisation. They describe a scene in the crowded women’s ward at Hindu Rao hospital in summer 1976, where ‘the senior

¹²⁷ Gian Prakash, Union Secretary for Health and Family Planning, Do. No. U12019-7/77-MEH (15 January 1977) File 41011/8/78-T4 (Bihar), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹²⁸ LSS Bulletin, Mumbai (23 November 1976) Subject Files 315 JP Papers, NMML, 403-405.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 406.

¹³⁰ ‘No Harassment in Family Planning, Assures PM’ *Times of India* (15 January 1977) 13.

¹³¹ ‘PM Challenges opposition to fight poll on policies’ *Socialist India*, 14.9 (29 January 1977) 7.

doctor grumbles as he steps over six women carpeting the floor of the ward. He looks around for the other doctors supposed to be assisting him. They are not present.' The doctor claimed that 'they are all at the Family Planning clinic, performing vasectomies' and collecting monetary incentives for doing so.¹³² The journalists also depicted the negative consequences of tubectomy operations performed under pressure in camps, as in the city's Kasturba Gandhi hospital women were 'put three to a bed' as 'nurses greet familiar faces who have a week or ten days ago come to the tubectomy camp. They are now back with their stitches broke, with puss oozing out. "There were deaths too", a nurse says.'¹³³

Elsewhere, sterilisation and MCH services were bound together during the Emergency, the latter positioned as part of the various incentives for the former. Announcing a series of these in June 1976, UP Health Minister Prabhu Narain Singh said that mothers who accepted sterilisation would receive 'special medical care' under 'the Mother Child welfare programme'.¹³⁴ The Government of Maharashtra made this connection clear in a set of guidelines issued for a month long family planning campaign from September to October 1976. One of the incentives accompanying this particular push for operations was that vaccines 'such as tetanus toxide will be given to family members of operated persons'.¹³⁵ A regional family planning conference in August that year noted, 'achievements of the MCH have not been developed'. The conference's agenda notes detailed that 'the Government of Maharashtra, with its introduction of compulsory sterilisation, has given a serious thought to the suitable measures for intensifying MCH services in rural areas'. Its reasoning for this intensification was to 'ensure that the welfare of mothers and children is really looked after in a manner which will create confidence in the minds of the rural population and indirectly support the small family norm'.¹³⁶ That this emphasis was only

¹³² Dayal and Bose, *For Reasons of State*, 14.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³⁴ 'All about family planning' *WOTM*, 20.6 (June 1976) 22.

¹³⁵ Government of Maharashtra, 'Guidelines to Observe' (15 September 1976) VI Zilla Parishad Wardha, SCI Papers, NAI, 13.

¹³⁶ Maharashtra Regional Family Planning Conference (11-13 August) Agenda Notes, File 41011/8/77-T4 (Maharashtra), SCI Papers, NAI.

supplementary to the state's sterilisation drive is evident from other documents, such as a District Health Officer's April 1976 order, which reiterated that 'the Government of Maharashtra has adopted a new strategy of population control where maximum stress has been given on sterilisation'.¹³⁷

Karnataka's Health and Family Planning Department issued similar instructions whilst emphasising the importance of providing post-operative care to the sterilised in November 1976:

It should also be ensured that special care is given to the acceptors and their families, that immunisation and nutrition programmes are properly extended to the children of the acceptors and that acceptors, their spouses and their children are generally looked after on a special basis. If this could be done in a way appealing to the public, the family planning programme is likely to get an impetus.¹³⁸

In these instances, authorities provided staples of the MCH programme like vaccines, nutritional guidance and general health care only as part of the sterilisation programme, not as policy or provision in their own right. Government added MCH services to the official list of incentives, with 'special care' afforded only to those who accepted sterilisation. In these examples, MCH also emerges a form of propaganda, deployed to appeal to the public and give an impetus to the Emergency's sterilisation programme and public perceptions of it.

Authorities also incentivised maternity leave and benefits. The Maternity Benefits Act (1961) entitled women to twelve weeks leave paid at their average daily wage. The Act also provided some medical allowance, protection against and prohibitions on arduous work, extended leave in the case of illness and complications, breaks for nursing on return to work and legal protection against dismissal.¹³⁹ Although many perceived the Act as inadequate, particularly given that numerous employers and establishments did not fall within its initial remit, it nonetheless ensured relief for some working mothers.¹⁴⁰ An

¹³⁷ Kulkarni, Joint Director, Department of Health and Family Planning, Do. No. FP/P&E-II/target-1976-77 (22 April 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Maharashtra) SCI Papers, NAI.

¹³⁸ Government of Karnataka, Order FPC/188/76-77 (17 November 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Karnataka), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹³⁹ Rita Rahimtoola, 'Are you aware of your maternity benefits?' *Femina*, 16.7 (28 March 1975) 19.

¹⁴⁰ For further discussion of this Act and its limitations, see Vibhuti Patel, 'Gender Equality and Human Rights in India' *Social Modernity – Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 1.2 (2011) 2.

Amendment passed during the Emergency actually extended its scope to apply to women employed in factories or establishments covered by the 1948 Employees State Insurance Act.¹⁴¹ In their surveys and tours, the CSWI observed the Act and its implementation in practice. Their report criticised instances where authorities did not strictly enforce it and the Committee asserted, 'we feel strongly about this measure, for the denial of maternity benefits to a working woman is likely to affect both the health of the mother as well as that of the child'. Their recommendations underscored the need for proper enforcement and argued that the Act be extended to all industries, with special committees established to ensure that implementing agencies did not restrict maternity benefits.¹⁴²

Restrictions on these featured frequently in state governments' collections of incentives and disincentives for sterilisation. Like many of the Emergency's measures, this was not completely new.¹⁴³ In September 1976, the Government of Tamil Nadu constructed a 'more elaborate scheme of incentives and disincentives...to motivate a significant number of the population to practice family planning and adopt the small family norm in line with the National Population Policy'. First on the agenda was a lengthy set of restrictions on maternity leave and related benefits, as authorities restricted leave with pay for government servants to their first three children. The state also limited the maternity benefits prescribed in the Tamil Nadu Medical Attendance Rules, to which both female employees and wives of male government servants were entitled, to the first three children. It levied charges in maternity centres for the fourth and subsequent children of all mothers unless they agreed to accept sterilisation following delivery.¹⁴⁴ Along with a catalogue of other disincentives

¹⁴¹ Mirian D'Souza, 'The Maternity Benefit Act' *Femina*, 17.25 (25 December 1976) 41.

¹⁴² CSWI, *Towards Equality*, 321.

¹⁴³ Matthew Connelly highlights the presence of restrictions around maternity leave in the government's family planning programme, although does not address the part they played in the Emergency's catalogue of disincentives. He noted that in Kerala, some officials 'called for the state to punish those who would not submit to IUD or sterilisations. At the end of 1966 both Kerala and Mysore had begun denying maternity leave to government employees with three or more children' (*Fatal Misconception*, 228). The Government of Maharashtra also placed previous restrictions on maternity leave for government servants with more than three children in an August 1967 order detailed in File 41011/8/77-T4 (Maharashtra), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹⁴⁴ Government of Tamil Nadu, Order 2476 (17 September 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Tamil Nadu), SCI Papers, NAI.

instituted and consolidated during the Emergency, the Government of Himachal Pradesh denied maternity leave for female government employees after their first two children.¹⁴⁵ An order from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi Commissioner issued in April 1976 instructed that along with no reimbursement of medical costs, advanced salary increments or recruitment and promotion, 'no maternity leave or abortion leave to be granted to a female employee who already has two children'.¹⁴⁶ The Shah Commission's note on the implementation of the programme in Punjab recorded that the state government placed various restrictions on its employees, including only granting female employees maternity leave for their first two children.¹⁴⁷

Interrogating these aspects of the Emergency programme and their relation to women's health and status is critical given that the government's rhetoric on these measures often claimed that they were positive for India's women. Speaking at SNDT Women's University in December 1976, Gandhi argued that 'those who oppose any element of pressure ought to remember that conservative groups once argued that forcing them to send their girls to school was a violation of their rights'.¹⁴⁸ This statement aligns not just birth control, but the Emergency's preferred method of sterilisation with an 'element of pressure', with education, as equally empowering for women. Gandhi claimed that the operation 'redresses the balance of the sexes, giving women greater control over their lives and children a chance of a better life'.¹⁴⁹ She invoked narratives about women's choice and freedom to justify the Emergency's programme. In a government pamphlet titled 'Time to Act Decisively' published in 1976, she asserted that 'the government's endeavour in the

¹⁴⁵ Gwatkin, 'Political Will and Family Planning', 38.

¹⁴⁶ V.K. Chanana, Deputy Commissioner, MCD Officer Order No. 15/CES (HCIV) (15 April 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Delhi), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹⁴⁷ 'Implementation of the Family Planning Programme During 1976-1977 in Punjab' File 41.11/8/77-T4 (Punjab), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹⁴⁸ Gandhi, *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 605.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

family planning movement is to promote, in a coordinated manner all activities which foster the healthcare and protection of mothers and the welfare of families'.¹⁵⁰

Other expressions of support for the institution of compulsive measures often oscillated around this issue of women's welfare. One letter to the editor published in *The Hindu* criticised the Central Government's decision not to legislate for compulsion and claimed that 'if we have to take the drastic step of compulsory sterilisation, the greatest gain of this measure will go to the women and children themselves. Freed from unwanted pregnancies, a woman can keep better health.'¹⁵¹ The declaration that 'acceptors' of sterilisation signed was couched in similar language. The Shah Commission's case file on the implementation of the programme in Meghalaya included an example of this declaration. Recipients of vasectomy completed information about their marriage, number of pregnancies and number of children and agreed to the following statement:

My wife and I realise that we cannot have any children after the operation, and this request for the operation is for my benefit and the benefit of my family and for the welfare of my children i.e. fuller family life and health of my wife will be permanently damaged if she has any more pregnancies.

The application for tubectomy had a similar emphasis on 'my health', and both declarations contained a clause committing the recipient to return the acceptors fee if any information declared on the form proved false.¹⁵²

The Emergency government regularly insisted on women's support for these measures. In an interview in early 1977 in which she claimed that there was 'no harassment in family planning', Gandhi underscored the programme's quantitative success and asserted that 'there is a great response especially among women who suffered worst on account of large families'.¹⁵³ Despite the government's explicit focus on vasectomy as a means of achieving its targets for sterilisation, Gandhi insisted that 'women have a special role to play' in the programme's implementation and acceptance. The Congress justified the

¹⁵⁰ *Time to Act Decisively: Extracts from the Prime Minister's Speech on Family Planning* (New Delhi: Ministry of Health and Family Planning, 1976) 1.

¹⁵¹ Aban Lal, Bangalore, 'Letter to the Editor: Compulsory Sterilisation' *The Hindu* (7 March 1976).

¹⁵² Annexure, File 41.11/8/78-T4 (Meghalaya), SCI Papers, NAI, 13-14.

¹⁵³ 'No harassment in family planning, assures PM' *Times of India* (15 January 1977) 13.

imposition of stringent measures by highlighting people's 'enthusiastic response' to the family planning drive, stressing that 'one of the salient features of the drive is the large scale participation of women in the programme. Reports from Kerala indicate that there is considerable enthusiasm for the programme amongst women belonging to all communities. Young and educated women are taking a lead in the matter.'¹⁵⁴

Measures relating to women's health and status did feature in the Emergency's NPP. Singh's statement stressed the need for higher female literacy rates, access to education and an increase in the age of marriage. The policy proposed to raise this to eighteen for girls and twenty-one for boys, and Singh argued, 'if the women of the country are to play their rightful role in its economic, social and intellectual life, the practice of early marriage will have to be severely discouraged'.¹⁵⁵ However, Singh also downplayed women's reproductive or health rights in favour of 'responsible reproductive behaviour both in their own as well as the national interest'.¹⁵⁶ The policy's primary focus, elucidated in Singh's opening statement, was not women's health. Instead, he emphasised, 'our real enemy is poverty'.¹⁵⁷ This overriding emphasis on responsibility and on quantitative, economic results underpinned the Emergency's programme. Long-term social welfare aspects were overshadowed by the short-term gains and statistical results afforded by simply sterilising people.

Chapter three explored how the Emergency government attempted to mobilise women to support aspects of the regime and its sterilisation drive was no exception. Earlier, this chapter drew attention to the hurdles faced by family planning field staff in Karnataka because of fears about impotence and marital strife following vasectomy. A Government Secretary in Haryana proposed to address such obstacles by utilising 'an important group which has hitherto either not been tapped at all or tapped very inadequately...the large

¹⁵⁴ 'Enthusiastic response to FP drive' *Socialist India*, 12.15 (13 March 1976).

¹⁵⁵ Karan Singh, *National Population Policy Statement*, 19.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

number of satisfied customers (i.e. fully sterilised persons)'.¹⁵⁸ Karnataka devised an interesting measure in its attempt to tackle these fears and increase sterilisations that involved mobilising women. In an order issued in September 1976, the state Family Planning Department's Director claimed:

It would be very effective to identify wives of the vasectomised men in the villages and make use of them, for this purpose. Such women whose husbands have undergone the operation in the village could be made to address or talk to small groups of men and women in villages and narrate their experience regarding their married life after their husband got vasectomised. This would certainly help to remove such unfounded and baseless misconceptions from the minds of the people.¹⁵⁹

The Director issued these instructions to supervisory field staff and ordered them to submit fortnightly reports on the progress of this scheme over the next three months. The Director's decision that women ought to be 'made' to speak about their marital lives and sexual relations in a public space underscores their position as instrumental here. This is not indicative of a family planning programme that focused on women's health or wellbeing, but one that sought to utilise women to enforce its sterilisation drive.

Evidence suggests that women's attempts to participate in or enforce the programme were fraught and they encountered particular difficulties when motivating others to accept the operation. *Satya Samachar* reported 'great resentment' amongst teachers in Delhi after education authorities ordered them to bring forward cases for sterilisation and the Shah Commission also investigated this.¹⁶⁰ Underground reports noted that this 'resulted in great harassment to the teachers, especially the ladies, who have to hear vulgar and cutting remarks when they go knocking door to door in search of family planning cases'. The teachers' resentment peaked when at a meeting, a local Deputy Commissioner 'rebuked a lady teacher who brought to his notice the difficulty of unmarried lady teachers

¹⁵⁸ *Shri* P. Hohar, Financial Secretary, Government of Haryana Health Department to Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and Heads of Department, Order No. 9239-3HBI-75/26443 (6 August 1976) File 41011/8/78-T4 (Haryana), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹⁵⁹ Government of Karnataka, FPO/65-76/77 (8 September 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Karnataka), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹⁶⁰ File 31204/84/78-Coord (SCI), Public Hearing: Case of Purchase of Sterilisation Cases and Motivation Certificate by School Teachers, SCI papers, NAI.

in persuading people to go in for family planning operations'.¹⁶¹ A letter to the editor of *Femina* expressed shock that 'state authorities have assigned young women teachers of higher secondary school with the job of producing at least five people for sterilisation within a specific period'. Reader Anil Datta argued that 'to expect these young women – some of whom are unmarried – to go from door to door persuading men that they will not lose their sexual powers after sterilisation is really too much'.¹⁶²

Feminist thinkers and activists across the world have long highlighted connections between female emancipation, women's control over their bodies and access to birth control. The CSWI asserted:

If the masses of Indian women are to be freed from their status as 'expendable assets', some of the obvious and immediate answers lie in releasing them from the bondage of repeated and frequent childbirth, providing them with *some choice in the size of their families* and *ensuring adequate medical facilities* to protect them during and against maternity (my emphasis).¹⁶³

The Emergency programme cannot be positioned alongside such attempts to improve women's status. Not only did it fail to ensure adequate medical facilities to protect women during maternity, it repeatedly sacrificed these in favour of focusing resources on and encouraging people to accept sterilisation. Although delivering birth control and limiting family size through these operations, the Emergency government failed to secure women a choice in determining the size of their families given the programme's often-coercive nature. The CSWI report allows us to historicise this neglect of MCH. It noted that that since the third (1961) and fourth (1969) five year plans, the government adopted an increasingly narrow approach to its family planning policies which focused on controlling population growth, and at the same time such policies 'became described as the most important government programme for women'.¹⁶⁴ The report seriously refuted that restricting the birth rate alone could be liberating for India's women: 'In our view, emphasising it [family

¹⁶¹ LSS, *Satya Samachar* (26 September 1976) Subject File 315, JP Papers, NMML, 336.

¹⁶² Anil Datta, Letter to the Editor, *Femina*, *Special Issue: Facts you should know about sterilisation*, 17.21 (21 May 1976) 5.

¹⁶³ CSWI, *Towards Equality*, 321.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 329.

planning] as a direct cause of improvement of women's status is somewhat exaggerated.' It underscored the obverse relationship, whereby improvements in women's access to education, employment and healthcare tend to result in the increased adoption of family planning methods.¹⁶⁵

Family planning policies played a crucial role in this report. From its array of evidence, the CSWI argued that 'childbearing in India, for the majority of women, is more of a health hazard than a natural function'.¹⁶⁶ Its praise for family planning in principle did not extend to praise of the government's programmes, and the Committee's observations about these pre-1975 policies support Williams's arguments about the need to situate the Emergency's defining aspects in larger historical contexts, and my arguments about the need to include gendered power relations and women's health as one of these. *Towards Equality* noted that since the third five-year plan, authorities increasingly emphasised time-bound targets over welfare. The report also observed 'the attempt to mount the programme on the lines of a military operation'.¹⁶⁷ The Committee recorded that many viewed such practices as responsible for cases of 'criminal mistakes', including the sterilisation of people outside of the reproductive age group. The CSWI objected to the intensification of these targets, especially where this meant less focus on healthcare and education, and it decried the use of motivators and financial incentives as negative for women's health and status. Despite these recommendations, all of these aspects greatly intensified under the Emergency.

4.4 'Four daughters and no son': Emergency sterilisation and the girl child

Discrimination and violence arising from son preference within the family has been a central concern for the contemporary women's movement in India. This discrimination and its consequences, including female infanticide and more recently, sex selective abortions,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 322.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 315.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 329.

have long and complex histories.¹⁶⁸ This was also a pressing concern for the CSWI, which positioned the consistent and rapid decline of the female to male sex ratio as a marker of gendered discrimination.¹⁶⁹ It identified a number of factors leading to this 'disturbing phenomenon', including higher mortality rates, higher incidence of disease, general neglect of women and women's health by both individual families and society at large and 'the marked preference for sons and the consequent neglect of female infants'.¹⁷⁰ The Committee's findings indicated that the desire for a male child was a central factor influencing couples' family planning decisions.¹⁷¹ It insisted that 'though the desire for children may not be, the desire for sons is widespread'.¹⁷² In the aftermath of the Emergency, this disparity and the discrimination faced by female infants was a key issue for women's groups and the organised women's movement, particularly with the advent of technologies in the 1980s, which precipitated new consequences of this discrimination in the form of sex selective abortions.¹⁷³

It is important to place the Emergency regime's restrictions on fertility and its coercive attempts to institute the small family norm within the context of this discrimination, primarily because perceptions of this 'girl child problem' are evident in the articulation and implementation of this policy. Evidence also suggests that the enforcement of restricted families and fertility intensifies the potential for discrimination, neglect and violence against female children. In women's centre Saheli's assessments of the long term damage done by India's population control programme's emphasis on restricting family size, the organisation insists that it has been 'bringing disrepute to the family planning programme, compromising

¹⁶⁸ For further discussion, see Rashmi Bhatnagar, Renu Dube and Reena Dube, *Female Infanticide in India: A Feminist Cultural History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005); Navtej Purewal, 'Disciplining the sex ratio: exploring the governmentality of female foeticide in India' *Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 21.5 (2014) 466-480.

¹⁶⁹ CSWI, *Towards Equality*, 9.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 311.

¹⁷³ See Vibhuti Patel, 'Sex Determination and Sex Preselection Tests in India: Recent Techniques in Femicide' *Journal of International Feminist Analysis*, 2.2 (1989); Roger Jeffrey, Patricia Jeffrey and Andrew Lyon, 'Female Infanticide and Amniocentesis' *Social Science and Medicine*, 19.1 (1984) 1207-1212.

women's health and accelerating the already declining sex ratio'.¹⁷⁴ Other studies highlight the conflicting nature of the desire for sons and the small family norm, arguing that forcefully limiting births without breaking down this bias ultimately increases discrimination against female children.¹⁷⁵

The Congress Party acknowledged this bias in June 1975. The Women's Front's monthly bulletin featured an article by a Delhi University economics lecturer, which commented that 'the Indian social system puts a special emphasis on the birth of male children, which is partly responsible for high rates of fertility as the expectation of having sons can lead to repeated pregnancies in the families dominated by female children'.¹⁷⁶ Another piece in *India Today*, which argued for a cafeteria approach to family planning, cited support for compulsory sterilisation from eminent doctors such as Dr M.M. Kothari, couched in terms of alleviating poverty and drains on resources. However, it also emphasised, 'what Dr Kothari has omitted to mention of is the repercussions that might follow the enforcement of such laws. The Indian's inherent desire to produce a male child as an heir, specially in the middle classes, where the male plays a dominant role as the breadwinner of the family creates an impasse.' This desire, it further argued, 'often results in a couple producing four or five daughters before a son might make his appearance. These people are not prepared to accept sterilisation and it is hard to pin the blame solely on them.'¹⁷⁷

During the Emergency, the Government of India and state administrations used 'eligibility' criteria in order to implement their catalogue of incentives and disincentives for sterilisation. At the basic level, all criteria consisted of lower and upper age limits and

¹⁷⁴ Saheli, 'Population Control: Extermination of the People', Souvenir Publication (1995) <https://sites.google.com/site/saheliorgsite/health/population-control/population-control-extirmination-of-people> (accessed 4 October 2014).

¹⁷⁵ For a further discussion of the relationship between fertility decline and gender bias, see Jean Dreze and Mamta Murthi, 'Fertility, Education and Development: Evidence from India' *Population and Development Review*, 27.1 (2001) 33-63.

¹⁷⁶ Atreyi Chatterjee, 'The Reproductive Life of Indian Women' *WOTM*, 20.11 (June 1975) 9. The article also cited a nationwide survey undertaken by a research group in Vadodara, which indicated that 88.5% of spouses interviewed stressed the need for a son.

¹⁷⁷ 'Needed Cafeteria Approach' *India Today* (15 March 1976) 13.

number of children. Some states, such as Kerala, Gujarat, Bihar and Maharashtra applied incentives and disincentives to those with more than three children, as the Central Government did for its employees. Several other states and union territories applied restrictions to those with more than two children, including Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab and Delhi. Along with these minimum criteria, authorities set out a number of exceptions, cases in which even if the couple were of the relevant reproductive age with the prescribed number of children, the Emergency's measures and restrictions need not apply. In most cases, these qualifiers included a reference to the sex of a couple's existing children.

The Government of Tamil Nadu set out several 'preferential treatments' for its employees who adopted the small family norm in an order issued on 17 September 1976, which barred the recruitment or promotion of individuals with more than two children. The order dictated that all new employees must agree to restrict their families to two children by accepting sterilisation, but qualified that this did not apply to those 'who have both children of the same sex'. It provided that 'in that event they may have one more child'.¹⁷⁸ The Governor of Himachal Pradesh made a similar provision. In a letter to the President of India in January 1976, he set out the state's extensive package of incentives and disincentives for its employees, reporting that 'a government person having children of two different sexes will be considered an "eligible person"'.¹⁷⁹ Authorities in Haryana demanded that all government servants with more than two children get sterilised by the respective dates set down 'except where both children are of the same sex'.¹⁸⁰ Despite the suggestion that anyone with either all male or all female children may be allowed to reproduce one more child, in the context of the widespread and deeply entrenched preference for sons these allowances cannot be separated from that gendered bias.

¹⁷⁸ Government of Tamil Nadu, Order 2476 (17 September 1976) File 41011/8/77-T4 (Tamil Nadu Vol 1), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹⁷⁹ SCI, 'Summary: Implementation of the Family Planning Programme', 21.

¹⁸⁰ Government of Haryana, 'Replies to Questionnaire on Family Planning', File 41011/8/77-T4 (Haryana), SCI Papers, NAI.

The Government of Haryana was more explicit about this provision in its bill on population, drafted during the Emergency. This stated that no person should have more than two living children but provided that ‘a person who has no living male child; or only two living children who are, or either of them is mentally retarded or deformed...he may have a third child and no more’.¹⁸¹ This statement’s equation of the sex of a child with disability posits the failure to produce a son as a handicap to the family. The Government of Punjab also made this connection. Setting out its package of incentives and disincentives it clarified that as an exception, ‘any government employee only having two children, neither of whom is a male child/either of whom is handicapped, he may have one more child’.¹⁸² *Femina* gave coverage to this particular caveat and to the dangerous gendered discrimination that underpinned it. One letter to the editor published in April 1976’s issue opened: ‘Scratch the Indian man and you’ll find the male chauvinist – this was my reaction to the measures proposed by the Haryana Government on family Planning.’ Leela Ramaswamy from Bangalore described the fine to be imposed on couples with more than two children as ‘perhaps understandable where milder measures have failed’. However, she asked, ‘what possible reason can there be for a third child if the first two are female? Perhaps the honourable members of our cabinet are not aware of our constitution which guarantees that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex.’¹⁸³

Maharashtra’s bill for compulsory sterilisation initially stated that it would only allow exemptions on health grounds and only permit recanalisation (a complex operation to reverse vasectomy) in cases where ‘all living children had died’. The draft bill explicitly set out that this would not be granted for families where ‘amongst all living children, all of the male or female children had died’.¹⁸⁴ The government’s decision to spell this out so explicitly

¹⁸¹ Government of Haryana, Population Control Bill, 1975, 41011/8/77-T4 (Haryana), SCI Papers, NAI, 142.

¹⁸² Government of Punjab, ‘Note on the Implementation of the Family Planning Programme During 1976-1977’, File 41011/8/77-T4 (Punjab), SCI Papers, NAI, 3.

¹⁸³ Leela Ramaswamy, Letter to the Editor *Femina*, 17.9 (23 April 1976) 5.

¹⁸⁴ Government of Maharashtra, The Maharashtra Family (Restriction on Size) Bill 1976, Asok Mitra Private Papers, Printed Material No. 427, NMML, 5.

suggests that it anticipated requests on these terms. When Maharashtra's Legislative Assembly adopted the final bill in July 1976, incorporating the recommendations of the Joint Committee of both Houses of the Legislature, it included a clause about the sex of a couple's existing children: 'The bill that emerged from the Joint Committee report also permits a fourth child to couples having all three male children or all three female children.'¹⁸⁵ Although, as noted, Central Government never formally approved this legislation, evidence suggests that authorities did make exceptions for couples without male children. Documenting his observations of a month long sterilisation campaign in a Maharashtrian village, Schlesinger described how 'the criterion of eligibility was having at least three children, unless all were female, in which case the number would be four'.¹⁸⁶

In their report to the Shah Commission, authorities in Punjab admitted receiving over 300 complaints about Emergency excesses in this programme. Some of these pertained to the use of force, death or illness after the operation, and the sterilisation of unmarried or elderly people. The state government also received complaints about cases 'in which operated persons desired recanalisation because of the death of male child after operations'.¹⁸⁷ Like Maharashtra's original bill, authorities in Haryana chose to grant exemption from operations only on health grounds. However, a letter clarifying this position revealed that a number of government employees asked to be spared because 'they have three or more than three daughters and as such there would be nobody to support them in old age'.¹⁸⁸

The Government of Maharashtra reported the following case to the Commission:

One Sonu Kawdu Paisadeli, working as a sweeper had four daughters and no son. As such he was not willing to undergo sterilisation. He was given a notice saying that he would be suspended in case he failed to undergo family planning. He therefore got himself operated and as a result became mad and had to get himself treated in the mental hospital.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ 'Maharashtra Bill on Sterilisation Passed' *The Hindu* (27 July 1976).

¹⁸⁶ Schlesinger, 'The Emergency in an Indian Village', 640-641.

¹⁸⁷ Government of Punjab, 'Note on the Implementation of the Family Planning Programme During 1976-1977', File 41011/8/77-T4 (Punjab), SCI Papers, NAI.

¹⁸⁸ Government of Haryana

¹⁸⁹ SCI, 'Note on Family Planning Programme in Maharashtra', 3.

The report's condemnation of this as an excess accepted *Shri Paisadeli's* right to want more children because he was yet to conceive a son. Whilst it did not elaborate on this man's treatment in the mental hospital, this case summary implies that his psychological reaction to the operation was a direct result of not only enforced sterility, but also the fact that he would no longer be able to father a son. The use of this case study as evidence of an excess genders the condemnation of the Emergency government and its use of coercion in its sterilisation programme. It stands accused not of removing a person's agency in terms of their right to reproduce, but exclusively in terms of their right to a male child. The Commission's report on the implementation of the programme in Maharashtra also placed this emphasis on the male child. It cited the case of Sonu Kawadu, from Nagpur district, who accepted sterilisation in order to avoid suspension, as threatened by his employer Ramtek Municipal Committee. His objection to vasectomy was that he 'had only four daughters and wanted a son'.¹⁹⁰ My earlier discussion of the importance of women in negotiations with the Emergency state examined the case of B.K. Boohare, a teacher from Buldhana District in Maharashtra, who put his wife forward for sterilisation when authorities threatened to terminate his employment. His primary objection to accepting the operation was also that 'he had four daughters and no son'.¹⁹¹

This case is a poignant one with which to close my analysis and to interrogate the gendered nature and implications of the Emergency's sterilisation programme. This teacher was, as the Shah Commission posits, a victim of the regime's coercive measures. However, both his initial apprehension and his response to the pressure he faced further problematise the situation, and speak to the complexities of the victim-agent paradigm identified by Emma Tarlo. His conviction about the need to reproduce until the birth of a male child evidences a gendered bias, one that was built into the sterilisation policies and criteria adopted by many states during this period. His insistence also raises serious questions about the need for family planning, rather than population control, which the Emergency's measures failed to

¹⁹⁰ SCI, 'Excesses in the Implementation of the Family Planning Programme in Maharashtra', 2.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

address. My assessment of the regime's treatment of MCH policies also demonstrates this failure. Further, whilst his wife's sterilisation kept this teacher's personal fertility intact, it still destroyed the family's possibilities of producing a son. The Shah Commission's note on this case did not comment on any of these aspects, on the victimised position of this man's wife, nor of the many other women encountered in this chapter as recipients or acceptors of coerced operations. This chapter has demonstrated that gendered power relations were formative in the conceptualisation, implementation and reception of the Emergency's sterilisation programme and challenged the notion that this policy affected men exclusively. By analysing ways in which aspects of the Emergency programme resonated with gendered norms and discriminatory practices, I make a case for the importance of employing a gendered perspective for understanding sterilisation during this period. In doing so, I foreground aspects of the programme and its functioning that have not previously been considered.

Chapter Five: Spaces of Emergency I: The home

This chapter positions the home as a critical site in Emergency politics. I examine instances where women's engagements with the regime traversed the public/private boundary, and took place within the home space or were shaped by discourses around domesticity. Through this discussion and the next chapter's assessment of women's incarceration, I highlight the need to explore the regime's presence in diverse spaces in order to reveal women's activism. The concept of location, both material and imagined, is central to much feminist scholarship. The home is often at the centre of explorations of how locations shape gendered identities and how dominant discourses about gender constitute places. The present chapter draws on these perspectives to write the home into our understandings of the Emergency.

I begin by making a case for reading the home as a politicised space during this period. Secondly, I draw on oral history interviews conducted with women who participated in anti-Emergency activities to foreground the home as an important location in resistance and a space that was subject to state surveillance. The next section furthers chapter three's analysis of narratives that highlight women's support for the regime. Using similar evidence from pro-Emergency groups, I examine their depictions of women's support as a direct extension of their roles as household managers, often revolving around the regime's economic programme and the government's efforts to keep prices down. Having established the importance of the housewife in such pro-Emergency propaganda, the chapter's final section assesses the role of this figure and the home space in satirical depictions of the regime, specifically in Behram Contractor's *Busybee* columns and cartoons, which featured in *Femina*.

5.1 Politicising the home

Existing scholarship reveals one clear connection between the home and the Emergency's national and political imperatives. Under its intensive urban clearance programmes, authorities demolished people's 'unregulated' residences, sometimes without warning.

They resettled individuals, families and entire communities in other, often poorly equipped places. This brought the politics of Emergency directly into domestic, private spaces. Tarlo observes that narratives of these resettlements were frequently gendered: 'Whilst most women recall feeling stranded without their husbands, many men expressed a feeling of helplessness about their inability to protect their women, children and homes.'¹ Gendered roles shaped people's experiences of this state intervention as, for example, 'women's memories tend to centre on the problem of re-establishing domestic activities – how to cook, where to get milk, where to sleep'.² Most existing literature on the Emergency is concerned with how it functioned in the public sphere and institutions such as the media, bureaucracy and political parties. Tarlo's analysis begins to highlight the regime's intrusion into more private spaces, such as the home.

The spatial and discursive divisions of society into public and private arenas and the construction of associated gendered roles are central concerns for feminist debates. As geographer Linda McDowell notes, these highlight the 'significance of geographical location to the construction of gendered identities'.³ Many scholars criticise this binary and demonstrate that the physical space of the home is often highly politicised, with shifting meanings and associations, which are not fixed. Histories that examine South Asian diasporas have been critical in exploring the complex and highly politicised processes that shape physical home spaces and in assessing women's roles within these contested spaces.⁴ In her work on the geographies of home, diaspora and empire, for instance, Alison Blunt observes, 'rather than view the home as a private space that remains distinct from public politics, a diverse body of work has shown that the home itself is intensely political,

¹ Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 138.

² Ibid., 140.

³ Linda McDowell, 'Spatialising Feminism: Geographic Perspectives' in Nancy Duncan (ed.) *Bodyspace: Destabilising Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996) 39.

⁴ See, for instance, Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); Samita Sen, 'Wrecking homes, making families: women's recruitment and indentured labour migration from India' in Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2013) 96-109; Alexander, Chatterji and Jalais, "'Always/already migrants': Brides, marriage and migration'.

both in its internal intimacies and through its interfaces with the wider world'.⁵ Assessing the importance of women's activism in the home in the Indian nationalist movement, Stephen Legg insists that it 'cannot be considered outside of the community, local or national scales that frame it'.⁶

Slum clearance is just one example of how the Emergency framed the home and women's activities connected to this space. This chapter extends and diversifies our understanding of this relationship. It blurs those boundaries between public and private spheres, revealing the home as a politicised space and a potential site of women's activism. This resonates with other analyses of the home's centrality in different moments of Indian national politics, particularly the anti-colonial movement. Partha Chatterjee's analysis of women's importance in nineteenth century nationalism hinges upon an innovative reading of the gendered separation of public and private spheres. Chatterjee argues that the separate spheres ideology was at the heart of this nationalism's emergence. He claims that the inner, spiritual domain (represented by the household and invariably women), became *the* site of nationalist culture and autonomy which needed protection from colonial intervention. He therefore suggests that the home 'was not a complementary but rather the original site on which the hegemonic project of nationalism was launched'.⁷ For Chatterjee the history of this struggle can 'be found less in the external domain of political conflict and more in the "inner" space of the middle class home'.⁸

Tanika Sarkar has written at length on the home's strategic position in this nineteenth century nationalism and the links between public and domestic spheres. She argues that women's domestic roles as well as the home space were politically inscribed, as 'the management of household relations becomes a political and administrative capability',⁹ positioning the household as the 'embryonic nation' and woman as 'the true

⁵ Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora*, 24.

⁶ Stephen Legg, 'Gendered Politics and Nationalised Homes: Women and the anti-colonial struggle in Delhi, 1930-1947' *Gender, Place and Culture*, 10.7 (2003) 7.

⁷ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 147.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁹ Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 38.

patriotic subject'.¹⁰ Within this construction, 'women were primarily responsible for deciding household purchases. They, therefore, served as the target of both nationalist appeal and blame.'¹¹ Sarkar's emphasis on the significance of women's roles as consumers, purchasers and household managers and their subsequent connection to the nationalist agenda is significant for this chapter's analysis of women's participation in the Emergency's economic programme. It also underscores a crucial element of this discussion: the home in question is usually a middle class one.

Saraswati Raju observes that the distinctions between 'private and public spaces are more important in some women's lives than others and the binaries are not always so pervasive'.¹² The home and its associated gendered roles, as social, historical and spatial constructions, are fluid rather than static and differ across multiple axes of power and positionality. Some argue that 'the private/public is a cultural project that emerged essentially for the middle-class moralities, particularly for those of white making'.¹³ Postcolonial scholars like Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty demonstrate that some understandings of the home, especially those that render it a place of safety, are often premised on the exclusion of non-white and working class women.¹⁴ bell hooks's conception of 'homeplaces' also questions the western-feminist analysis of domestic spaces as sites of women's subordination, as they may be beyond the reach of racial oppression and actually be fertile ground for women's politicised resistance.¹⁵ Raju similarly emphasises the fluidity of the public/private binaries in South Asian contexts, where 'the outside and the inside do not necessarily correspond with Eurocentric notions of the divide'.¹⁶

¹⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹¹ Ibid., 35.

¹² Saraswati Raju, 'Introduction: Conceptualising Gender, Space and Place' in Saraswati Raju (ed). *Gendered Geographies: Space and Place in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011) 13.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Chandra T. Mohanty and Biddy Martin, 'What's Home got to do with it? In Chandra T. Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonising Theory, Practising Solidarity* (London: Duke University Press, 2003) 85-105.

¹⁵ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991).

¹⁶ Raju, *Gendered Geographies*, 13.

Whilst sensitive to these diversities, I argue that the gendered divisions between public and private spheres remain relevant for an exploration of the politicisation of homes and domesticity during the Emergency. Raju maintains that whilst women's movements across its physical boundaries may regularly occur, 'overall, women's primary association with domesticity continues to frame their interaction across this binary...Their presence in public spaces, more often than not, is to legitimise carrying out these responsibilities within the confines of the familial orbit.'¹⁷ The distinction remains valid for this analysis, firstly because many of the women discussed in this chapter do belong to the kind of middle class home with which these divisions are most frequently associated. Popular narratives of the specifically middle class housewife and their place in the national imaginary are an integral factor in the chapter's analysis of satirical representations of the Emergency. Further, I am not only interested in activities that take place within the physical space of the home, but also in how discourses of domesticity frame women's engagements with the regime that occur in other places. For example, women sometimes implemented the twenty-point economic programme in public spaces, but these activities were frequently represented, encouraged and legitimised in the context of their domestic roles.

5.2 *'We fought back, we retained our spaces': Resistance in the home*

The home functioned as an important site of resistance in the underground movement. As a result, it was a target of the Emergency government's surveillance measures. Legg locates the home as a critical space within the geography of the Indian nationalist movement in the early twentieth century. He contrasts his work with Chatterjee's analysis because it situates women within the home as active agents in this movement, rather than as sites on which the anti-colonial struggle was enacted. Legg insists that whilst much attention has been paid to women's public participation in anti-colonial protest, 'the physical movement onto the street should not always be equated with the achievement of a political act'. He

¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

argues, 'while acknowledging the courage of such women, there can often be more evidence of political activity within the home than beyond it'.¹⁸

Recent trends in historiography on the Emergency have shifted attention towards the resistance movement which, given the regime's restrictions on the expression of dissent, necessarily moved underground. In the summer of 1976, JP asserted that 'the opposition of women to Mrs Gandhi's dictatorship is equal to that of men'. He singled out 'Mrs Mrinal Gore, Socialist MLA [Legislative Assembly Member] from Maharashtra who went underground immediately after Emergency was proclaimed and did a lot of basic work before being arrested'. In Bihar, where JP's movement for Total Revolution began, he claimed that 'women underwent long jail terms while fighting against the dictatorship and they continue to carry on the struggle'.¹⁹ Women's participation is occasionally evident in underground literature. For instance, the West Bengal Citizens Committee, organised by dissident Congress O members and led by *Smt* Abha Maiti, published the Pabanaco Bulletin.²⁰ *Satya Samachar* also occasionally reported on arrests of high profile women, notably Mrinal Gore and Marathi writer Durga Bhagwat.²¹

Reports from the LSS's ten-week long *satyagraha* campaign, launched in November 1975, suggest more widespread women's participation. One described the protests as off to 'a flying start' in Delhi, with 108 volunteers courting arrest at Chandni Chowk, raising slogans against the government, 'including seven ladies'.²² In a letter to JP in December, LSS Secretary Ravindra Verma described the *satyagraha*'s progress, emphasising that 'hundreds of women, students and even children have participated in these programmes'.²³ After the programme, the Samiti reflected that in Maharashtra, 'participation by women was also on significant scale. Not only in the metropolitan centres like Bombay, Delhi, Nagpur

¹⁸ Legg, 'Gendered Politics and Nationalised Homes', 16.

¹⁹ JP, 'Statement on the eve of his departure from Wardha to Patna' (1976) Subject Files No. 315, JP Papers, NMML.

²⁰ Basu, *Underground Literature*, 7.

²¹ A September 1976 issue, for example, reported on both Bhagwat's arrest and Gore's transfer to Bombay Central Prison. See *Satya Samachar*, No. 7-8, 26 (September 1976) in *Ibid.*, 51.

²² *Swaraj*, No. 13 (December 1975) Press Clippings File No. 14, JP Papers, NMML.

²³ Ravindra Verma to JP (24 December 1975) Subject Files No.316, JP Papers, NMML.

and Pune, but as a number of small towns like Nanded, Buldhana, Sangli, Palghar and the *Adivasi* area of Javhar, did the ladies offer *satyagraha*, some of them with babies in arms'.²⁴ Another review reported that 'in this International Women's Year, the fair sex is in healthy competition with men. They have proved to be far ahead of their male counterparts in this struggle for the preservation of democracy and fight against dictatorship.' Whilst noting that 'undeniably' fewer women than men participated in protests, the LSS insisted that 'however, lady *satyagrahis* have given a great fillip and aura to this movement'.²⁵

These references to women's participation were rare and the broad generalisations or one line about arrests gives little detail about the realities of women's participation. The nature of the underground movement and reports on it, which remain necessarily fractured, compound this lack of detail. Oral history is an important tool for locating further evidence of women's anti-Emergency activities within this underground network. As highlighted in chapter one, this method has become a staple of feminist scholarship given women's absence from archives and it is an essential tool for uncovering the histories of private spaces, which are also absent from the historical record. Legg notes, 'as a site of memory and political re-imagination, women's activities in the home have often gone unrecorded and unrecognised, just as their economic labour went unpaid and undervalued'.²⁶ Women's reflections in oral history interviews were anchored in particular spaces and the home featured frequently across their narratives. That is not to say that women's engagements with the underground resistance movement were confined to the home: oral histories reveal that women traversed this boundary and participated in opposition within and outside of the domestic space. Rather, through these women's narratives I reveal that private, home spaces were significant, highly politicised sites in the network of underground activities.

The nature of the Emergency and the resistance movement invested such spaces with particular importance. The home was an important site in feminist scholar Professor

²⁴ LSS, 'Fight the Dictatorship: A brief report of the movement for the year' in Basu, *Underground Literature*, 177.

²⁵ LSS, Review of Satyagraha in Basu, *Underground Literature*, 14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

Vibhuti Patel's engagements with the regime during this period. In an interview conducted in late 2014 in her office at SNDT Women's University's Churchgate campus in Mumbai, Vibhuti described the range of anti-Emergency activities that she participated in. When Gandhi imposed the regime, twenty-year-old Vibhuti was studying for a Master's in Vadodara (formerly Baroda), Gujarat. She was an active member of a left wing student organisation, which became increasingly involved in the political agitations preceding the imposition of Emergency. She recalled, 'we decided that it was no use only pontificating so we started a group called study and struggle: study the society and struggle against injustice and exploitation'.²⁷ The group formed links with trade unions and engaged in grassroots work with the city's poor. It was in this context that Vibhuti protested in solidarity with the Railway Strike in 1974 and participated in the *Nav Nirman* student movement.

State elections in Gujarat in June 1975 placed an alliance of opposition parties under the Janata Front in power, until disagreements led to the Front's collapse early in 1976 and Central Government imposed President's Rule. Describing the Janata Front's governance, Vibhuti asserted, 'that is why Gujarat became the centre of anti-Emergency activity. Political leaders and student leaders from all over India, from Gandhians to Naxalites, across the spectrum of political activists, they would descend to Baroda.... It was very active there; lots of meetings would take place.' For Vibhuti and her student group, a degree of anti-Emergency activism was possible in the public sphere from regime's early days. She told me, 'when the Emergency was declared we protested on that same day'. They 'organised debates in the university on democracy versus dictatorship. We were also using public platforms, we used to have sit-ins, public debates at the town hall of the city and we would go and make public speeches against the Emergency.'²⁸

Despite the relative freedom in the state, Emergency measures still limited resistance activities, particularly after the imposition of President's Rule in March 1976. Vibhuti described numerous instances where she was 'picked up' by police, yet she also

²⁷ Vibhuti Patel, Interview with Author (Mumbai: November 2014).

²⁸ Ibid.

emphasised a degree of mobility: 'we would be arrested, taken away in a truck. But they would just take us far away from the city and we would come back walking...Prisons just did not have the capacity, sometimes they would just use open ground and take hundreds of people there in a truckload.' She reflected on the regime's restrictions and her capacity to negotiate these, as she traversed the city and its public spaces in her anti-Emergency activism:

Communication was only possible by meeting people personally. I remember meeting people or taking leaflets, walking for an hour and a half from one end of the city to the other to take them. When I've been back I marvel that I used to cover the city from one end to the other, walking or on a bicycle! Because during curfew hours you were not allowed to use a bicycle, you had to walk and through the back lanes. It was a time of a lot of courage.

Although Vibhuti was able to carry on resistance activities in public spaces, she emphasised the illicit, and potentially dangerous, nature of this in her insistence that this kind of activity, literally confined to back lanes and relatively hidden spaces, required 'a lot of courage'. Her reference to 'curfew hours' also reveals that this was heavily restricted.²⁹

As a result, the home was also an important space in the landscape of Vibhuti's activities, particularly for her group's efforts at communication. She was involved in the production of their underground journal *Mumkin* (meaning possible), which the group primarily produced within members' homes: 'that was the time, during the Emergency, when activists learnt a new technology. That meant having a cyclostyling machine at home'. The regime shaped the introduction of new technologies and alternative spaces within this politics of resistance: 'we had a cyclostyling machine and we would hold meetings, as during the Emergency, you weren't allowed to hold meetings at all, so we had to meet in people's homes'. The extension of political activity into the domestic space was necessary given the restrictions on public expressions of discontent. Vibhuti's reflections situate the home not as a mere substitute, but a haven: 'it became a commune. All the young boys and girls were thrown out by family members and we were newly married. We were married as students,

²⁹ Ibid.

and people would just descend on our home'.³⁰ The home functioned as a haven from both the Emergency's restrictions and family dictates. Eventually, *Mumkin* 'had to be stopped because everything had to go for censorship and this was centralised'. For Vibhuti, these political activities within the home space, especially the construction of this underground literature, constituted significant labour and hard work. The minute detail in which she described the production of their group's bulletin reinforces this:

I remember cutting the stencils: we would get the stencil and the stencil pen, and you cut the stencil with nice handwriting. Then you would have a cyclostyling machine in your house and take out the copies manually. Or we would carbon copy and use tissue paper and you could copy six handwritten at a time.³¹

Vibhuti's comments render the home space as an important site in the struggle and one of the resistance movement's most critical, labour intensive activities.

Emphasising Vadodara's location as an epicentre of anti-Emergency activism and its connections to a wider resistance network, Vibhuti recalled, 'Pushpa used to travel from Mumbai carrying all of the letters, because every letter was intercepted so she would keep them hidden under her blouse. She would bring all of those letters from leaders here to Baroda'.³² 39-year-old Pushpa Bhawe worked as a teacher and drama critic during this period based at Ruia College, Mumbai. Connected to Socialist Party members, she was active in underground opposition and took on the role of Janata Party Secretary in the city after the 1977 election. Pushpa continues to work as an activist on issues around women's rights and social justice. She told me about her experience of the Emergency and the underground movement in an interview at a hotel in south Mumbai in November 2014. As well as sharing her Emergency experiences, Pushpa brought along literature relating to a conference on violence against women that she was co-organising, underscoring the trajectory between her activism then and now.³³ Pushpa also began the story of her

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ 'Violence: A Human and Political Predicament', A South Asia Women's Conference (Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre for Social Justice and Peace in South Asia) 5-7 December 2014. Conference report available online:

Emergency experience with two anecdotes relating to pre-1975 incidents, which oscillated primarily around her concerns about gender equality and activism for women's rights. She recalled protesting against the 'street censorship' of Marathi writer Vijay Tendulkar's play *Sakharam Binder* in 1974, as right wing groups attempted to block its performance 'because the play took a stand that was anti-marriage'. In response to complaints by young Naxalbari girls that 'the police had mistreated them, tried to molest them', Pushpa also described getting 'some women together and we published a letter in the *Times of India* and in Marathi newspapers, stating that this was against sanity and against citizenship rules'. For Pushpa, these were 'incidents that I always feel were connected to my experience during it [the Emergency]'.³⁴

As well as locating her anti-Emergency activities in this trajectory of gendered politics, she discussed the roles that women played. Pushpa observed that 'women were afraid and some really did side with Indira Gandhi because she was a woman'. She maintained that 'although the overall support was not that much, women supported the anti-Emergency work in many ways'. Like Vibhuti, Pushpa was involved with a student group and she described how 'one woman from outside the college used to help us a lot. She was sort of a housewife, but she also used to work in a printing press and she would lend the printing press and materials to us'. Although Pushpa's involvement in conveying letters from underground leaders evokes a degree of mobility, her reminiscences also underscore the danger that this engendered. She described travelling to rural areas under various guises in order to talk to communities about the dangers of the Emergency: 'for instance we would go to the farmers. In those days there was one particular bee that was injurious to the farm'. Pushpa and other activists travelled to farms under the pretence of organising a meeting about this bee and other issues, so that their aim 'on the surface would be for meeting the farmers, discussing this problem and offering advice to remove the bee. Then once the

http://www.keshavgoretrust.org/mrinalgorecentre/download/Report_TISS_Workshop.pdf (accessed March 2017).

³⁴ Pushpa Bhawe, Interview with Author (Mumbai: November 2014).

meeting had started we would slowly move round to discussing the Emergency'. These personal meetings were an important aspect of the resistance movement. Pushpa described how she 'used to go to villages and take meetings because circulating papers was not enough, you have to make contact, so although meetings were not allowed we used to take them'.³⁵

Pushpa exercised a degree of mobility in her anti-Emergency activism and some of this did take place in public, institutional spaces. Her group held discussion groups within the college and produced underground literature: 'we took sections from classical literature, classical social literature, which was relevant for being against the Emergency', Xeroxed and distributed these newsletters. Pushpa was also part of the organising committee for the *Marathi Sahitya Sammelan* (Marathi Literary Festival) held in November 1975. This committee elected Durga Bhagwat as its President, partly because she expressed antagonism towards the Emergency. Pushpa recalled that 'in a sense we wanted to say that she was speaking against Emergency, now we have her in the President's place as a gesture'. The festival took place in Karad, a city in southern Maharashtra, which was also Foreign Minister Yashwantrao Chavan's birthplace, and so the committee invited him to the event. This, Pushpa revealed, 'was another gesture'. During Bhagwat's address, 'she made everybody stand up, and at that time JP was very ill in the prison so she made everybody stand up and pray for his health. So even Yashwantrao Chavan had to stand and pray for this'. During the festival, several individuals expressed their opposition to the regime, and Pushpa distributed letters 'requesting people to rise against the Emergency'.³⁶

This public opposition was fraught. Police later arrested Durga Bhagwat and detained her for the duration of the Emergency. During the festival, Pushpa recalled 'the city was thick with police'. She also emphasised that in the college, the student group she belonged to 'had to choose who was involved very carefully' and 'after months together a police inspector came and said that there was something going on in the college'. She

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

described many 'close calls' with state authorities and emphasised that 'I was not arrested although I dodged it many times'. At one village meeting, Pushpa described receiving 'a message that the police were coming. There was a doctor who had a scooter and he said, "can you ride a scooter with me? We'll go through the jungle way"'. She narrowly escaped arrest here and on several other occasions.³⁷

Because of these restrictions and the threat of arrest, Pushpa's home and others were important sites for underground resistance. She described at length how her home became a place to shelter people who went into hiding to escape arrest: 'I used to house all the important people who were underground, for example Mrinal Gore used to stay with me very often'. The home was, as in Vibhuti's narrative, a safe haven. She recalled, 'it was me, my husband and my mother in the house and I was worried about my mother, but I told her that we are going to do this and somehow she took to it'. Pushpa asserted both her political agenda and familial authority. She emphasised that her family 'was not a political family' and that it was her initiative to bring politics into the home space. She encouraged her husband to continue in his job as a government newsreader, 'as his going there would be an easy façade for us' and help to keep the internal political activities undetected. Indeed, the whole family was implicated in this endeavour: 'because my mother was in the house we could go to work and there would still be somebody with the person'.³⁸

Pushpa revealed, 'we never kept a person for more than four days at a time, so Mrinal used to stay with me off and on, but never for a stretch of longer than four days'. We get a sense of the regularity that she was engaged in sheltering people, as well as the routines and networks established in the running of this underground activity. The four-day rule highlights the danger that this work posed to Pushpa, her family and her home, which also housed meetings and other resistance activities:

While they stayed with me we would have small workshops inside the house...against the Emergency, using paper plates, not making sounds, not producing any flash. My husband used to lock us in from outside and go somewhere, so on the face of it the house would be closed but the meetings

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

would be going on...My house was not very big but we used to have fifteen people for a meeting, from various places in Maharashtra.

Pushpa assumed an assertive and primary role in these activities, with some minor assistance from her husband who locked them in from outside to maintain the disguise of non-political domesticity. The details she gives about not making sounds nor producing flash underscore the personal risks she took in holding these activities in her home. As a potential site for resistance, and an established space in the geography of the underground network, the home was also a target for the state's repressive measures.³⁹

Pushpa alluded to a network of domestic spaces within this underground movement that were under surveillance. In one of her 'close calls' with authorities she revealed, 'once it happened that there was a known house where people used to work, the police came and I opened the door! I had gone for other work, I was not supposed to be there, and I opened the door to this police inspector, who smiled and that time nothing happened'. When she escaped from the police at the village meeting by riding on a doctor's scooter through the jungle, she elaborated that 'the police came to the place of the meeting but they didn't find me as they came from the main road. From the jungle way we escaped and immediately I caught a Bombay train but the police went to my friend's house in Nagpur, which was very near, they must have thought that I had taken refuge in his house. So that time I was not arrested.' These *known* houses were part of the government's surveillance network.⁴⁰

As Pushpa's house was near the grounds of Ruia College, she was affected when authorities increased their surveillance before Gandhi's scheduled visit to Mumbai. The night before, the College Principal sent for Pushpa: 'I was used to the Principal sending for me so I didn't think that it was anything different. When I went out and saw the jeeps I understood, and I was a little afraid because in my house there was all of the material against Indira Gandhi that we were to use the next day for her visit. I couldn't send a message because they were right there, so I thought I would just go and see what happens!'

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Police took a sample of her handwriting, questioned her and placed her under house arrest for the day of Gandhi's visit. Pushpa emphasised 'it was only house arrest, nothing happened'. She further stressed its ineffectiveness, as she was still able to distribute the materials lodged at her home. The concept of house arrest, in any case, loses some of its punitive impact given the extent to which Pushpa's home and others functioned as highly politicised hubs of resistance.⁴¹

For Professor Uma Chakravarti, aged 34 and working as a teacher at Miranda House Women's College, Delhi University, during the Emergency, the regime also intruded into private spaces. I interviewed Uma at her home near Delhi University's south campus and she highlighted expressions of discontent and acts of resistance that permeated Miranda House. She emphasised, 'we fought back, we retained our spaces'.⁴² Uma depicted a number of ways that the regime intruded on college life and the campus and recalled instances where staff and students mounted resistance. Miranda House refused to host Sanjay Gandhi during this period and resisted attempts to change its democratic functioning by replacing its elected Staff Association and Union with a nominated Staff Council led by the Principal. Uma also recalled a 'vibrant intellectual community' where 'after a while, we got really angry with what was going on and there was a lot of at least sharing of our views amongst ourselves'.⁴³ Uma gave me glimpses of this vibrant, intellectual community of women, which engaged consistently with anti-Emergency protests and sentiments, by reading extracts from a collection of testimonies from staff and students produced for Miranda House's fiftieth anniversary.⁴⁴

My interview with Uma, and some of these commemorative narratives, emphasise the intrusion of the Emergency's repressive measures into domestic and private spaces. Uma described how across the University and city, 'there was this rampant sense of fear

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Uma Chakravarti, Interview with Author (New Delhi: October 2014).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Uma Chakravarti, Radhika Singha and Ramya Sreenivasa (eds.) *Reliving Miranda, 1948-1998* (New Delhi: Privately Published, 1998).

because of the massive sense of surveillance that had been imposed. The police came to our place'. Her home became part of this surveillance as police searched for her brother-in-law, a member of a Marxist-Leninist group that the government banned under the regime. Uma reflected that 'It was a fearful experience, perhaps not *fearful* fearful...actually it was. It was a very repressive act, the invasion of a home'. She described how 'they didn't actually come inside the house but they surrounded the place. We were living in a house, in a house by ourselves, in a little plot of land like this one'. Her emphasis on being 'by ourselves' and on a small plot of land underscores her sense of vulnerability, which is reinforced by her description of how authorities returned two days later, under the guise of a postman with a money order for her brother-in-law. She recalled, 'we weren't even at home, we were away at work but our son was home. Even he could make out the signs of the police', with their crew cut hair and brown trousers. She stressed that 'it was clear to him, and he was only ten, that this was a nonsensical scheme on the part of the police'. This intrusion into the domestic space epitomised the regime's repressive measures, as Uma subsequently described it as 'a very depressing time. One would go to sleep with a pit in the stomach and get up in the morning with a pit in the stomach'.⁴⁵

The politics of Emergency not only played out in Uma's domestic space, but crossed that public/private boundary as an affective, deeply personal and upsetting experience. This was a common conception within the narratives from Miranda House. Academic Susan Visvanathan's contribution to the collection similarly positions the Emergency as an affective intrusion on her personal, emotional wellbeing and on the internal dynamics of the college community, which she depicts as a family, where the teachers 'were/are wonderful women. They took care of us like mother hens'.⁴⁶ In Susan's narrative, the imposition of Emergency functions as the turning point at which her positive recollections abruptly end: 'soon enough we were full of eighteen year old anguish – the Emergency was happening

⁴⁵ Uma Chakravarti, Interview with Author.

⁴⁶ Susan Visvanathan in *Reliving Miranda*, 177.

outside, and somewhere it started getting bleak and suicidal in us'.⁴⁷ Although she depicts the regime as something happening 'outside', in the public sphere, her emotive description of its effects demonstrates its penetration inside the college boundaries and on the students' subjectivities, feelings and even bodies. Her assertion that 'it started getting bleak and suicidal in us' suggests a deeply internalised experience. Susan also describes how two students 'Annie and Vasudha shaved their heads and went about looking a little crazed, but still very beautiful. I began to suffer from an unspoken anxiety. It was not political because I didn't understand the word – it was an absorption of the currents around us'.⁴⁸ This internalisation provoked emotional responses and physical, bodily markers, as 'Renuka, Neena and Anita went around looking unkempt, wild hair straggling, ragged jeans'.⁴⁹ Women's anti-Emergency narratives demonstrate that its politics traversed the public and private spheres by underscoring their affective impacts and the presence of both the regime's intrusions and resistance to these within home spaces.

5.3 'Prices and women': The Emergency's economic programme

On 1 July 1975, Gandhi announced the Emergency's twenty-point economic programme to the nation. This proposed an array of measures for economic development aimed at various sections of the population.⁵⁰ Many of them were not new. However, Gandhi insisted that the Emergency's climate of discipline, law and order was necessary for their implementation.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Visvanathan in *Reliving Miranda*, 179.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ 'The 20-point economic programme' (New Delhi: AICC, July 1975), Jack Askins Papers, Mss.189/P/1/3/3/7, Modern Record Centre, Warwick. This booklet set down the points from the text of Gandhi's broadcast to the nation on 1 July. It recorded the full twenty points as follows: steps to bring down prices and increase distribution of essential commodities; implementation of land ceilings and speedier distribution of surplus land; provision of house sites for the landless and weaker sections; the abolition of bonded labour; liquidation of rural indebtedness; review of minimum agricultural wages; five million more hectares of land to be brought under irrigation; an accelerated power programme; development for the handloom sector; improvement in the quality and supply of people's cloth; ceiling on vacant urban land; prevention of tax evasion and punishment for economic offenders; special legislation for the confiscation of smugglers' properties; liberalisation of investment procedures; new schemes for workers' association in industry; national permit scheme for road transport; income tax relief to the middle classes; essential commodities at controlled prices to students in hostels; books and stationery at controlled prices; new apprenticeship schemes to enlarge training and employment opportunities.

She warned, 'do not expect magic remedies and dramatic results. There is only one magic that can remove poverty and that is hard work, sustained by clear vision, iron will and the strictest discipline'.⁵¹ Gandhi also maintained that the removal of opposition was necessary for these results. She asserted, 'with the fumes of hatred cleared somewhat we can see our economic goals with greater clarity and urgency. The Emergency provides us with a new opportunity to go ahead with our economic tasks'.⁵² The following month Gandhi insisted that 'the economic programme now announced was not the reason for Emergency but the Emergency has created the right climate for its implementation'.⁵³

The government positioned this economic agenda as one of the regime's main benefits. In June 1976, *Socialist India* celebrated it primarily through reports about the progress made on this front.⁵⁴ The first of these twenty points, which aimed to bring down prices and increase distribution of essential commodities, was at the heart of these celebrations. Announcing the programme, Gandhi insisted that 'the first and foremost challenge is on the price front. In the last few days, the prices of many articles have shown a downward trend. This trend will have to be maintained'.⁵⁵ She claimed that the government was forced to impose Emergency 'with a heavy heart but we were helpless'. She insisted, however, 'you have seen the impact these measures have had. Prices started falling and we witnessed a new wave of discipline'.⁵⁶ Because of the government's 'deterrent action against pedlars, smugglers, profiteers and hoarders',⁵⁷ *Socialist India* claimed that 'in a matter of months, the psychology of scarcity has almost disappeared'. These comments

⁵¹ 'New economic measures', text of Indira Gandhi's broadcast over AIR (1 July 1975) 37 (625)/75 PMS, Prime Minister's Secretariat Files, NAI.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵³ 'The most important thing in life is to be committed to one's country' *Socialist India*, 11.11 (16 August 1975) 15.

⁵⁴ *Socialist India*, 13.4 (26 June 1976): 'Editorial – a year of relief' 1-2; 'Lifestyle is changing' 5; 'AICC report review of implementation of the twenty-point programme' 9-12; 'Delhi's achievements under Emergency' 16; 'Gains of the year' 25-30.

⁵⁵ 'The 20-point economic programme'.

⁵⁶ "'Defend democracy: eradicate poverty" PM's call to the nation' *WOTM*, 19.7 (July 1975) 8.

⁵⁷ The Maintenance of Internal Security Act (1971) and Defence of India Rules (1971) are two pieces of preventive detention legislation that the Emergency government used to detain opponents, dissenters, economic offenders and those deemed 'anti-national'. I discuss these in detail in the next chapter.

appeared in an article entitled 'essential commodities cheaper and plentiful under Emergency'.⁵⁸

Since independence, the actions of both ruling Congress governments and opposition ensured the prominence of the politics of consumption. As Clibbens notes, in establishing fair trade shops, rationing measures and other policies, 'Congress governments in New Delhi and the states took on responsibility for the basic needs of the people', while opposition parties and their organised agitations on these issues 'ensured that consumption and prices became inescapably *political*'.⁵⁹ For instance, Joya Chatterji notes that in the first decade after independence and partition in West Bengal, 'the single most powerful weapon in the left's armoury was the high price of food'. Protest campaigns and charges of maladministration and corruption, she argues, eroded support for the ruling Congress government and bolstered support for the CPI in the state. In turn, 'the government grew even more heavy-handed in dealing with unrest, using batons, bullets and tear gas rather than the gentler arts of persuasion', particularly in its attempts to repress a 'food movement' organised by parties on the left in 1959.⁶⁰ Neither the political importance placed on these issues nor the government's use of heavy-handed measures to tackle them were inaugurated with the imposition of Emergency in June 1975.

Women played critical roles in this highly politicised consumer sphere, mobilising extensively over issues of price rise and the availability of essential commodities in the APRM earlier in the decade. The Anti-Price Rise Joint Women's Front oversaw demonstrations in Mumbai against food grain shortages and high kerosene prices which spread throughout Maharashtra and neighbouring Gujarat. Although most of its leaders were elite members of political parties, the movement was notable for a high turnout of women across social classes - including many housewives - and the iconic gendered

⁵⁸ 'Essential commodities cheaper and plentiful under Emergency' *Socialist India*, 11.4 (6 September 1975) 12.

⁵⁹ Clibbens, 'The Indian Emergency', 22.

⁶⁰ Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 2007, 307-308.

symbolism of women protesting with *thalis* (dishes) and rolling pins. Nandita Gandhi claims that 'at the peak of the movement there were as many as 10,000 to 20,000 women marching down the streets with rolling pins in the hands, shouting slogans and waving flags and banners. The bulk of them came from the slums and tenements of the city'.⁶¹

These women's agitations became enmeshed in the political conflicts leading up to the Emergency. Nandita Gandhi notes, 'the APRM came to an abrupt halt with the arrest of most of its leaders during the Emergency in 1975'.⁶² It began to splinter in 1974 because of the widening gulf between its CPI (M), Socialist Party and CPI members, over their conflicting stances towards Gandhi's government and the JP-led movement against it. The NFIW became disillusioned with the Front's emphasis on protest: 'convinced that the shortage could not be changed by organising consumers' resistance...or by shouting slogans against Indira Gandhi', it called for an organised struggle against hoarders, black marketeers and industrialists instead.⁶³ The NFIW reported that 'there were a lot of elements in it occupying important positions who gradually tried to link it up with the movement led by JP'. As a result, the organisation withdrew its support: 'in the name of fighting against rising prices and corruption, the NFIW, which has always defended democracy, could not align itself with anti-democratic forces'.⁶⁴

The issue of price rise in 1975 sits firmly within these contexts although, as Clibbens argues, 'few scholars have taken the twenty-point programme seriously'.⁶⁵ Scholars and commentators have frequently dismissed it because its component measures were largely recycled existing policies, or because it was less critical to the regime than other measures, like urban clearance and sterilisation. Such dismissal 'underestimates how political the twenty-point programme was, and how it was designed to appeal to "public opinion" as the government understood it'.⁶⁶ Clibbens notes that in its attempts to appeal to consumers in

⁶¹ Gandhi, 'Masses of Women', 223.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶³ NFIW, *Ninth Congress*, 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁵ Clibbens, 'The Indian Emergency', 31.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

this manner, Gandhi's government often focused on particular groups of consumers such as students, agricultural labourers and industrial workers.⁶⁷ However, I argue that women were also critical here. Gandhi's Congress frequently called upon women to participate in this programme and this was actually the Emergency measure that many organised women's groups got most involved with. Both calls for women's participation in the Emergency's consumer agenda and their expressions of support for the programme foregrounded women's roles as household managers. Explaining APRM's aims, Nandita Gandhi observes that 'it was understood that prices affected women most severely because all of them regardless of class looked after the family'.⁶⁸ In the precarious political and economic climate before Gandhi's imposition of Emergency, government leaders exhorted women to contribute to the nation on these terms. In January 1975, Minister of Commerce D.P. Chattopadhyaya highlighted the 'leading role women can take in the present economic crises', because 'our women, no matter how diverse their interests and spheres of activity are today, are essentially custodians of the household economy. It is to them we look for the adjustment of consumer behaviour on a national level'.⁶⁹ The Emergency heightened this emphasis because consumer behaviour and the household economy were prominent in the regime's agenda. This domestic responsibility framed many pro-Emergency women's engagements with Gandhi's regime.

A piece simply titled 'prices and women', published in October 1975's *WOTM*, made these connections explicit. It noted that 'prices affect every home and family', locating this issue within the domestic space and as an area of concern for its female members.⁷⁰ The report expressed satisfaction with the discipline brought by the declaration of Emergency in many sectors, but also anxiety that 'the retail trade, which deals directly with the consumers' was still 'acting independently of the emerging disciplined social order'. *WOTM* endorsed

⁶⁷ Ibid., 37-39.

⁶⁸ Gandhi, 'Masses of Women', 217.

⁶⁹ *WOTM*, 19 Republic Day Special (January 1975) 3.

⁷⁰ 'Prices and Women' *WOTM*, 19.10 (October 1975) 1.

the suggestion that the remedy for this lay 'with the role of the consumer. And the consumer context means more woman than man':

As Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has been ceaselessly telling groups of women coming from all over the country to meet with her in the morning and sitting at her residence, no social evil can be successfully fought without women coming to the fore to shoulder new social responsibilities...If our sisters, more specially of the Congress and other likeminded folds, become more active in the consumer field, and strengthen and widen the base and scope of the consumer movement and organisation, the results would surely be rewarding.⁷¹

This allied the Emergency's economic issues with domestic responsibility. *WOTM* placed women at the forefront of the regime's efforts in this area, as women were 'the fittest to keep such vigilance'.⁷² It projected an ideal of women's participation, which remained in keeping with domestic roles, carving out a space for women's active engagements. The report concluded by expressing its hope that 'the Congress Women's Front at various levels would act with great vigour and earnestness in this vital sphere that concerns our daily life and living in every hearth and home'.⁷³

The CPI advocated women's participation on the same terms. Both *Socialist India* and *The Patriot* endorsed senior Congress leader and Delhi Metropolitan Councillor Jag Pravesh Chandra's statement about women's capacity to fulfil the Emergency's consumer goals. Published in *The Patriot* in September 1975, this was explicit about women's special ability to slow rising prices, as 'most shoppers are women, who are the heart and mind of every household. It is they who are most affected by unreasonable prices'.⁷⁴ Chandra underscored women's particular capacity to act on this front by forming committees to visit shops and monitor prices in their local areas. Upon finding discrepancies, shopkeepers with higher prices 'should be (politely) told so. He will listen to this advice, for if he does not do so, news of his attitude will spread among consumers of the colony and he may lose much

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 2.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ 'Women are watching committees' *The Patriot* (15 September 1975) 8. The Congress Party also published this in *Socialist India*, 20.18 (18 October 1975).

of his trade'. This report concluded by cementing its call for women to mobilise within the Emergency context:

Since the proclamation of Emergency, the government is doing its best to bring prices of essential commodities down to a reasonable level. Local 'Women are Watching Committees' would supplement the efforts of the government and the presence of these watchful feminine eyes will deter any shopkeeper from charging unreasonable prices.⁷⁵

This situated 'feminine' qualities and women's domestic location as crucial for efforts on this front. Chandra ended this appeal by insisting that 'responsibility for the formation of such committees is with the women, the keepers of the household'.⁷⁶

Calls for women's participation in the Emergency on these terms proliferated. Gandhi stated that 'voluntary organisations, especially women, should be actively associated in the implementation of the economic programme'.⁷⁷ In October 1975, social worker Sarojini Varadappan also asserted that the twenty points 'should not remain a government programme. Women have to join in the implementation'.⁷⁸ She emphasised that women's services were 'greatly needed for implementing public distribution system through which an outlet can be created for supply of essential commodities like kerosene and controlled cloth'.⁷⁹ *WOTM*'s first edition of 1976 reported on Gandhi's requests for 'women to lead the consumer movement' in a message to the Consumer Action Forum, Calcutta.⁸⁰ This report quoted extensively from Renuka Ray's (Forum President and former West Bengal Chief Minister) address at a Forum meeting:

In recent months, particularly after Emergency, a dynamic drive has been launched to check profiteering and to enforce observances of a better trade code. Many traders are cooperating. But the best guarantee is an alert and vigorous consumer movement and women are eminently suited to leading such action.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ 'Women back economic programme' *The Patriot* (12 July 1975) 1.

⁷⁸ Sarojini Varadappan, 'Women and the new economic programme' *WOTM*, 19.10 (October 1975) 41.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ 'PM Asks women to lead consumer movement', *WOTM*, 20.1 (January 1976) 19.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Ray highlighted the importance of the Emergency's stringent measures and argued that these, coupled with women's participation, were the best way to bring about the goals set out in its twenty-point programme.

Congress and CPI reports demonstrate that women responded to these calls. At an exhibition on the programme organised by the Congress Women's Front in Gujarat in June 1976, the state's Pradesh Congress President Hitendra Desai asserted 'that the Women's Front has undertaken constructive work in Gujarat towards the fulfilment of the twenty-point programme. This had created a climate of confidence amongst the people'.⁸² At the AICC session in Gauhati in November 1976, the national Women's Front revitalised its 'pledge to activate vigorously the consumer cooperative movement for production and distribution and essential commodities'.⁸³ These efforts proliferated in the party ranks. Female members of the Delhi Pradesh Youth Congress formed price checking mechanisms and enforced these across the city: 'In Punjabi Bagh, about fifty girl volunteers of the Youth Congress found irregularities in price lists, stock registers and weights. The traders were warned'.⁸⁴

Other state sanctioned and pro-Emergency women's groups took up this aspect of the Emergency. A July 1975 meeting of the National Committee for IWY resolved that 'women's committees will be set up at *mohalla* (neighbourhood) and village levels to cooperate with the authorities and to keep vigil over implementation of various steps announced by the government to check hoarding, adulteration, smuggling of food grains and foodstuffs and price rise'.⁸⁵ In September 1975, the People's Forum for Radical Socialism established a women's consumer vigilance committee to monitor the retail prices of essential commodities in Delhi. At its first meeting, the 'committee voiced its full support to the twenty-point economic programme initiated by the Prime Minister'.⁸⁶ An article on this committee's work a year later entitled 'women's consumer vigilance committee demands

⁸² 'Exhibition on twenty-point economic programme' *WOTM*, 20.6 (June 1976) 36.

⁸³ 'Women's pledge to activate co-op movement' *The Patriot* (2 December 1976) 8.

⁸⁴ 'Volunteers of Youth Congress Check Shops' *The Patriot* (9 August 1975) 8.

⁸⁵ 'Women resolve to keep vigil' *The Patriot* (3 July 1975) 8.

⁸⁶ 'People's Forum set up Women's Consumer Vigilance Committee' *WOTM*, 19.9 (September 1975) 21.

people's committees to ensure price stability', placed the group at the forefront of this policy's implementation.⁸⁷ This reported that the women's committee 'has been functioning to protect the consumer's interests in terms of the Prime Minister's twenty-point programme'. It also called for no relaxation of the 'firm, bold, socialistic measures and the climate of discipline created by Emergency' because this was 'surely conducive to the enforcement of such measures'.⁸⁸

The NFIW similarly welcomed the Emergency's 'bold' measures and emphasised women's role in its economic agenda. Its memorandum expressing this foregrounded the economic programme: 'we fully support the twenty-point economic programme and are asking the three lakh members of the NFIW all over the country to give their cooperation in the implementation of this programme'.⁸⁹ The memorandum expanded on how they should contribute: 'we are asking women to form vigilance committees in their areas against black marketeering, adulteration of food articles etc'. The NFIW's expressions of support often revolved around the issue of prices and this was the Emergency policy that it encouraged its members to implement most fervently.

NFIW President Aruna Asaf Ali continued to express this solidarity and rally women to hold the Emergency price line. The CPI cited her insistence that 'the twenty-point economic programme was long overdue. The NFIW, she said, was carrying on a campaign to popularise the programme and called upon women to play their role in implementing it'.⁹⁰ In September 1976, addressing a meeting of the Federation's Delhi branch, Ali 'told the conference that the real test of the Delhi Federation would be how it could best implement the programme', after it included working for the implementation of the twenty-points in its resolution.⁹¹ The NFIW's Ninth Congress report described the points as a 'fitting corollary' to Emergency rule. This detailed various ways that the organisation and its branches were

⁸⁷ *WOTM*, 20.9 (September 1976) 26.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ NFIW, 'Memorandum to Indira Gandhi', 7 July 1975, 37 (625)/75 PMS Files, NAI.

⁹⁰ 'President of the NFIW Aruna Asaf Ali' *The Patriot* (26 July 1975) 1.

⁹¹ 'Women told to help eradicate poverty' *The Patriot* (12 September 1976) 8.

working towards the programme's implementation on the ground, particularly regarding price rise and commodity distribution.⁹² The NFIW recorded enthusiasm in Maharashtra and West Bengal and detailed activities organised by state branches of the Federation. In May 1976, NFIW units in West Bengal organised a rally of women and collected one thousand women's signatures on a memorandum 'to focus attention on the problems of increased milk price, inadequacy of buses, black marketeering and prices of essential commodities'.⁹³

The housewife was an important figure in appeals for women's participation in implementing these measures. In her Independence Day speech in August 1975, Gandhi set out ways that people could cooperate with the new regime: 'there should be no wastage, we should not hoard...if prices go up, housewives should try to find out why it was happening and whether they could check it. Whenever there has been a collective effort, they have always succeeded.'⁹⁴ In July 1975, *The Patriot* featured a report entitled 'housewives on warpath',⁹⁵ depicting female volunteers who 'went round several shopping centres in Chandni Chowk and Connaught Place to check if traders were displaying price tags and stock position'. The group, organised by Executive Councillor O.P. Behl, was given 'authorisation to check any irregularities'.⁹⁶ Social worker Sarojini Varadappan's reflections on 'women and the economic programme' recommended that housewives 'should also try to hold the price line by restricting our wants and purchases to what is essential'.⁹⁷

Chapter three demonstrated that pro-Emergency groups foregrounded women's support for the regime and utilised this to project a positive image. The housewife was a central figure in these representations. Varadappan underscored the relief that the Emergency's economic measures brought to the nation's housewives: 'when I was in Patna for a seminar, many housewives expressed their overwhelming support and satisfaction that the Emergency has brought peace and normalcy'. 'They all agree' she claimed, 'that

⁹² NFIW, *Ninth Congress*, 84.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁴ 'Call to the nation on Independence Day' *Socialist India*, 11.12 (23 August 1975) 26-27.

⁹⁵ 'Housewives on warpath', *The Patriot* (9 July 1975) 8.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Sarojini Varadappan, 'Women and the new economic programme', 41.

democracy did not mean that anyone could do anything he liked.⁹⁸ In its praise for the 'thirty days of miraculous discipline' following the declaration of Emergency, *Socialist India* insisted, 'it has been a month of relief to the housewife' because of achievements regarding prices.⁹⁹ A special feature on people's perceptions of the Emergency, titled 'What Emergency means to them', dominated one March 1976 issue.¹⁰⁰ As well as highlighting praise from female students, a restaurant owner and a DDA engineer, 'a housewife' graced this issue's cover. The bulletin insisted, 'the Emergency has come as a boon to the housewife. She was at her wits end because of the rising prices of essential commodities'. It quoted 'housewife' *Smt* Rani Seghal's comments about improvements in the price situation: 'vegetable oils were selling at Rs. 13 per kg in June. Now these are available for Rs. 6 to 7 kg. The price of mustard has come down...Prices of pulses and other commodities have also come down and stabilised'.¹⁰¹ *Smt* Seghal told the bulletin that 'we hardly had wheat at fair price shops before the Emergency...coal was scarcely available. Now one can have it for asking'.¹⁰²

Towards the end of the Emergency, prices began to rise and President Ahmed attributed this to 'anti-social intermediary speculators'.¹⁰³ In one of her addresses to the AICC's Gauhati session, Gandhi asserted that 'a little bit of slackness in Emergency measures has already had its effect on prices'.¹⁰⁴ *WOTM* returned to the integral position of the housewife in its August 1976 report on these setbacks. This stated that 'no amount of official explanation, much less the traditional excuses of trade, would suffice to convince the common housewife who runs the household that the current price rise, the first of its kind since Emergency, has any justification whatsoever'.¹⁰⁵ Woman in the role of the 'common

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ 'Thirty days of miraculous discipline' *Socialist India*, 11.12 (2 August 1975) 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Socialist India*, 12.14 (6 March 1976) 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² K Muralidharan, 'The Impact of Emergency', Ibid., 23.

¹⁰³ 'Vigilance on Prices', *Socialist India* 14.4, 25 December 1976, 1.

¹⁰⁴ 'PM's Inaugural Speech: Take the fruits of freedom to the underprivileged' *Socialist India*, 13.26 (27 November 1976) 3.

¹⁰⁵ 'Prices rise again' *WOTM*, 20.8 (August 1976) 4.

housewife' was the primary critic of the Emergency's economic situation here. In its criticism of the private sector, *WOTM* stressed the need to 'ask it firmly to behave' and co-operate with the national endeavour of bringing down prices. It appealed 'to the woman power of our country, more specifically within the Congress fold and among progressives, to mobilise all efforts to counteract the mischief of the speculators, hoarders and profiteers'.¹⁰⁶

Women's involvement in implementing Emergency measures was frequently connected to their location and roles within the home. Pro-Emergency forces mobilised these narratives to encourage women's support. To some extent then, domestic positions prescribed the terms on which these women engaged with the regime. However, evidence discussed here also demonstrates that women were actively involved in this facet of the Emergency's agenda. Further, instances where women's groups attempted to shape their participation on their own terms reveal active engagement rather than passive support. In October 1975, Congress and *Rajya Sabha* member *Smt* Maragatham Chandrasekar called for women in Kerala to implement the Emergency's economic agenda. She insisted, 'women have got a very extensive role to play at this present juncture' and 'they should come forward to successfully implement the twenty-point programme'.¹⁰⁷ She also advocated that 'they should try to make the common people understand the circumstances that led to the declaration of Emergency, what is Emergency and how it works'. However, Chandrasekar did not suggest that the responsibility for this lay solely with women. She urged the Congress leadership to 'create conditions for women to come out more zealously for activities which will contribute to the growth of our economy' and 'make the [twenty-point] programme a success'.¹⁰⁸

The NFIW's supportive memorandum similarly charged the government with the responsibility of creating conditions to facilitate women's public participation. Whilst asking women to form price committees it emphasised that 'these committees can be effective only

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁷ '*Smt* M. Chandrasekar's call to Kerala women for implementing PM's twenty-point programme' *WOTM*, 19.10 (October 1975) 1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

if they have some recognition of the authorities concerned'. It questioned women's capacity to shoulder national responsibility in the way that Gandhi frequently called for, asking 'there are no lists of fixed prices or essential commodities available to the public, so how can they check the prices?'¹⁰⁹ The NFIW also highlighted that 'often it is very difficult for women to approach the authorities responsible for enforcing price control', suggesting a lack of power within this public, institutional context.¹¹⁰ The organisation concluded that 'we are confident that for this programme our members will work with all sincerity and enthusiasm. But they will get demoralised if they find their efforts futile and they cannot stop the prevalent malpractices.'¹¹¹

This organisation did not simply acquiesce with requests for women's participation arising from their domestic roles. It attempted to exert agency over the terms of this participation and ensure women's capacity to engage in this aspect of political life. In its coverage of this memorandum, *The Patriot* reported that 'Mrs Gandhi assured the Federation leaders that she would examine their suggestions'.¹¹² Reports from the NFIW's Ninth Congress suggest that this assurance did not become reality. In West Bengal, the Federation noted that women's participation was 'generally hampered' by the 'reluctance of government bureaucratic machinery to accept popular participation in the work'. Likewise, it recorded, 'the earlier enthusiasm of common women in Maharashtra is now waning because of the resistance of the vested interests and hardened bureaucracy in the matter of implementation of the twenty-point programme'.¹¹³ As well as facilitating their engagements with, and support for, the regime, women's association with the household economy sometimes hampered their ability to participate fully.

Both Congress and CPI leadership shared a concern about women's capacity to actively implement Emergency measures given restrictions on their public and political

¹⁰⁹ NFIW, 'Memorandum to Indira Gandhi', 7.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² 'Women back economic programme' *The Patriot* (12 July 1975) 1.

¹¹³ NFIW, *Ninth Congress*, 84.

participation. Acting on consumer issues, in a manner conceptualised as an extension of their domestic roles as household managers, provided a way to negotiate these restrictions and foster women's participation in this Emergency policy. Partha Chatterjee argues that women's associations with domesticity in nineteenth century nationalist ideology did not preclude their movement outside of the physical boundaries of the home. On the contrary, this symbolism made 'it possible for her to go into the world under conditions that would not threaten her femininity'.¹¹⁴ Chatterjee argues, 'once the essential femininity of women was fixed in terms of certain culturally visible spiritual qualities, they could go to schools, travel in public conveyances, watch public entertainment programmes, and in time even take up employment outside the home'.¹¹⁵ With public participation anchored in a domestic activity, women could engage in the Emergency programme outside of the home in ways that did not conflict with essentialist notions of femininity, although the extent of this participation was sometimes inhibited.

5.4 'A great deal of fun with the middle class housewife': Satirising the Emergency

The domestic realm was also an important sphere in which satirical representations of the Emergency played out. In January 1975, *WOTM* featured numerous reports on women's status. Writer Yashodhara Dalmia asserted that 'no matter to which class they belong, they are still treated as the property of men and continue to regard themselves as such. They exist to perform three main functions – childbearing, serving as sexual machines and running the house'.¹¹⁶ Dalmia commented on popular conceptions of women's roles as household managers:

The media have a great deal of fun with the middle class housewife. And no wonder, for one gets the impression that she is more a puppet than a real person. Her sense of reality seems to be limited to the price of vegetables, to the exclusion of major events taking place in the world.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 131.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Yashodhara Dalmia, 'Women Behind the Mask' *WOTM*, 19.1 (January 1975) 31-34.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Such limited depictions of the housewife's identity, centred on her consumer position, often appeared in the national media during this period. Caricatures of women's domestic roles featured regularly in satire on the Emergency. I explore these in detail through a discussion of journalist Behram Contractor's *Busybee* columns.¹¹⁸ I examine how Contractor articulated his commentary on these events through domestic scenarios located in the home space, drawing extensively on popular conceptions of the middle class housewife as consumer.

Contractor, a veteran Mumbai-based journalist, wrote and published *Busybee* for thirty-six years, initially as a reporter for the *Times of India* group, before establishing his own tabloid in 1985. Gyan Prakash describes these columns and their cartoons, written from the male character Busybee's perspective, as 'popular and characteristically witty'.¹¹⁹ Farzana Contractor, Behram Contractor's wife, labels them 'tongue-in-cheek satirical masterpieces'.¹²⁰ Contractor applied this tongue-in-cheek satire to all aspects of political and social life and he engaged explicitly with the State of Emergency, particularly criticising its censorship. Discussing the state of freedom of expression in India in 2013, Salil Tripathi noted that 'the gifted columnist who wrote under the pseudonym Busybee, said about the Emergency of 1975-1977, the only safe topics left were crickets and mangoes'.¹²¹

During this period, Contractor published *Busybee* in *Femina*, a bi-monthly women's magazine belonging to the *Times of India* group. Commentators fail to address this specific location. Prakash discusses Contractor's work and *Femina* separately but does not connect the two. He posits the 'popular and glossy women's magazine' as a signifier of Mumbai's high culture, featuring 'mainly articles on style, health and beauty, relationships and celebrities'.¹²² Although the magazine did publish this kind of material,¹²³ it also engaged

¹¹⁸ I use '*Busybee*', in italics, to refer to the title of the column and 'Busybee', not italicised, to refer to the name of the character that the columns feature.

¹¹⁹ Gyan Prakash, *Mumbai Fables* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2011) 5.

¹²⁰ Farzana Contractor, 'Introduction' in Farzana Contractor (ed.) *Busybee: The best of thirty-six years* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2002) v.

¹²¹ Salil Tripathi, 'Freedom of Expression: Indians are becoming increasingly intolerant' *Forbes India*, 12 August 2013 www.forbesindia.com/printcontent35855 (accessed 27 October 2015).

¹²² Prakash, *Mumbai Fables*, 6.

¹²³ For example, 'Monsoon Cookery Special' *Femina*, 16.13 (20 June 1975); 'Knitting and Crochet Special' *Femina*, 16.18 (29 August 1975); 'New Trends for the Well Dressed Woman' *Femina*, 16.24 (21 November 1975).

with the political situation more frequently than Prakash acknowledges.¹²⁴ Editor Vimla Patil commented directly on the stereotypical view that women's magazines failed to engage with politics in a February 1977 editorial:

There are certain presumptions in journalism. And we, as women journalists, come across them more often than we like. Presumption number one: women are not supposed to be interested in politics. In a nation which has been rather spectacularly led by a woman for over a decade, women's journals are still not invited to political press conferences or meets.¹²⁵

Patil exposed the falsity of this assumption both here and through *Femina's* many pieces on the political situation leading up to elections in 1977.¹²⁶ Her comments also capture the women's magazine's ambiguous stance towards Gandhi and the Emergency, demonstrated by many articles published in its aftermath. Some reports emerged from a sympathetic position, as *Femina* included Gandhi in its list of the 'superwomen of India'.¹²⁷ It also reproduced Janardan Thakur's assessment of her potential come back, including the assertion that 'some have even started saying, as Mrs Gandhi is saying, that the Emergency was and is the only way to rule this country'.¹²⁸ However, the magazine also covered abuses of fundamental rights and democratic norms under Gandhi's rule¹²⁹ and reproduced extracts from some of the most prolific post-Emergency exposés.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ During the Emergency, *Femina* published several features dedicated to women's issues, rights and status. Its June 1976 edition centred on the theme 'is the law fair to women?' and included 'A Dictionary of Legal Jargon' for its female readers and several articles on violence against women. See, H.N. Ramchandani 'Rape Victims: The Legal Odds' and Freney Ponda, 'The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act' in *Femina*, 17.12 (4 June 1976) 35 & 37. The previous month, the magazine engaged with one of the Emergency's most controversial topics with a special edition titled 'facts you should know about sterilisation', *Femina*, 17.11 (21 May 1976).

¹²⁵ Vimla Patil, 'This Fortnight' *Femina*, 18.4 (25 February 1977) 3.

¹²⁶ See, for example, the following month's special issue on elections: 'Election Special: Meet your women candidates, know what they stand for, vote with confidence' *Femina*, 18.5 (11 March 1975).

¹²⁷ 'Meet the superwomen of India' *Femina*, 18.22 (4 November 1977) 15.

¹²⁸ Janardan Thakur, 'Will all the Prime Minister's men put her together again?' *Femina*, 18.24 (2 December 1977).

¹²⁹ The magazine reported on political imprisonment under Emergency several times in its aftermath: 'Prison and Polo: A Princess Remembers' *Femina*, 18.9 (6 May 1977) 25 & 27; 'Women Prisoners Tell all' *Femina*, 18.8 (22 April 1977) 31. It also included extracts from Inder Malhotra's 'The Year in Review' which criticised the regime and 'its attendant evils' and way in which 'the Empress was dethroned' although it also expressed concerns about the conduct and capabilities of the Janata Government, *Femina*, 18.26 (30 December 1977), 13.

¹³⁰ For example, Nayantra Sahgal, 'Indira Gandhi: From consensus to tyranny' *Femina*, 18.25 (16 December 1977) 45; Uma Vasudev, 'The two faces of Indira Gandhi' *Femina*, 18.16 (12 August 1977) 22-23.

The *Busybee* columns featured in *Femina* engaged with political issues on a regular basis. They appeared in most editions of this English language magazine, whose primary readership was India's literate, English speaking, female middle classes. Contractor usually located the columns in the home space, anchoring his satirical explorations of the Emergency and other issues in family sketches and the home's physical and discursive domain. In his praise for Contractor's work Prakash notes, 'poking fun at everyone while offending no-one, Busybee became known and loved as a classic Bombay figure – at home in its metropolitan chaos while remaining alive to the absurdities of its everyday life'.¹³¹ From this pre-occupation with the city's metropolitan culture and the absurdities of everyday life emerged a focus on the family and home, which frequently mobilised the figure of the middle class, metropolitan housewife and consumer.

Femina's January 1976 edition contained the first column focused on an Emergency measure: 'Busybee and family take a close look at twenty-point and other programmes'.¹³² Criticisms of this programme often emphasised its lack of innovation. In a speech in parliament in July 1975, Socialist N.G. Goray asked 'what is new in that? You have been announcing this programme from the housetops ever since there was a rift in the Congress. This is nothing new. What prevented you from implementing this programme?'¹³³ Busybee's reflections resonate with these critiques, but Contractor located them in the domestic space and articulated them through a family discussion. In the column, Busybee and his two sons discuss the Emergency's twenty points at home but quickly digress into debate and confusion about the government's many other programmes. The family unit anchors this critique, which opens, 'the other day I was explaining to my children the salient points of the new programmes before the country'. He tells them that 'once all the points in the programme have been implemented, the entire face of society will change'.¹³⁴ The overly simplistic statement verges on absurdity, and speaks to the opposition's accusations that

¹³¹ Prakash, *Mumbai Fables*, 5.

¹³² *Femina*, 17.2 (16 January 1976) 49.

¹³³ Basu, *Underground Literature*, 10.

¹³⁴ 'Busybee and Family take a close look at twenty point and other programmes', 49.

the points were token statements, rather than planned policies aimed at real social change.¹³⁵

A family debate over which of the government-endorsed programmes will change the face of society ensues, as they highlight a plethora of existing schemes. Their absurdity increases as the discussion proceeds. Younger son Derek suggests, 'let us also consider Mr Vijay Merchant's ten-point programme to discover and train young fast bowlers in the country', while elder son Daryl proposes that they also address the aims of a six-point plan 'to be tried out experimentally in south India for a change of diet'. As the list goes on, Busybee asks his sons, 'are you sure you are not making all of this up?' The sheer variety of programmes creates a laughable scene, as the Busybee family references a thirty-point drive to import Czechoslovakian films and a thirty-five point one to revamp the medical profession. The conversation ends with Busybee's observation that 'they should not have so many programmes, they confuse young minds'.¹³⁶

This exchange localises the Emergency agenda, positioning it in the home space and as a family issue, which is pertinent when read against this chapter's discussion of the connections between the regime's economic programme and domestic roles. The following month, the magazine featured a column entitled 'Busybee as the most disciplined man in the world'.¹³⁷ Busybee projects himself as an individual who characterised many of the social and economic ills that Gandhi cited to justify the imposition of Emergency and that the government claimed it would eradicate:

I was always an undisciplined person, stubborn, rebellious and headstrong. I regret to say that I used to fight with the chief and sneer at good advice and run down constructive projects and travel in trains without tickets and buy rice on the black market...and encourage strikes and demonstrations and jump bus queues and live a life of ostentatious vulgarity and go to the office and have long lunch breaks and report sick when I was not sick and stick posters on the walls.

¹³⁵ One article in the Socialist Party's bulletin claimed that Gandhi's intention for the programme was to 'present the people some eye-wash. Her shrewdness is demonstrated in the fact she picked up some programmes related to the rural areas so that the weaker sections there would not grumble if they were not implemented while the urban people would not be able to call the bluff of her propagandists who would be harping on the programmes meant for the betterment of the rural people'. See Pannalal Surana, 'Emergency: A Balance Sheet' *Janata*, XXII.1-5 (February 1977) 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ *Femina*, 17.4 (13 February 1976) 23.

Busybee depicts these problems through his family relations: 'I was at breaking point. My family was divided and my wife used to tell me I would regret my lifestyle. Most of all, my economy was in a bad shape'.¹³⁸ With the imposition of Emergency and its crackdown on these behaviours 'about six months ago', Busybee depicts a change in lifestyle that made him see the error of his ways. Rather than explicitly representing the Emergency's policies as re-educating his behaviour, he claims that they had an unconscious effect on his life: 'something happened. I do not know exactly what happened and certainly nothing major changed in my life, but slowly I started changing'. He became worried about being late for work, disputed his chief's judgment much less and refrained from jumping queues to the extent that 'I was spending the major portion of my day at various bus stops in the city'. The latter suggests that the reforms were redundant, without the government's emphasis on productivity. He further asserted that 'I had become more receptive to new ideas (which were actually old ideas in a new form)', resonating with January's column's critique of the twenty-point programme.

Nonetheless, Busybee records a wholehearted change into a busybody: 'I was feeling better, more dedicated, fulfilled. And I was feeling like a responsible citizen. Not only did I know what I had to do myself, but I was telling my friends what they should do.' He ends his reflection, 'so here I am, one of the most disciplined persons in the world. People say something must have happened. They say there must be some new woman in my life who has changed me. But I know of no such woman'. An unguarded gesture to the woman who brought about this change – the female Prime Minister – this final reference also underscores the role of Busybee's wife, who he reveals persistently chided him about his undisciplined lifestyle.¹³⁹

Contractor explored issues around discipline, the Emergency's economic agenda and women's roles in this in Busybee's April 1976 column, titled 'the latest budget sends

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

economic discipline haywire in the Busybee household'.¹⁴⁰ Set in the Busybee family home and anchored in middle class women's positions as consumers and household managers, this depicted the implications of the Finance Minister's latest budget for the family's domestic economy. Once Minister C Subramaniam declared the budget, Busybee's wife became adamant that they must purchase a new television: 'the government has reduced excise duty on TV sets so that all middle class families like ours can buy one. If after this act of kindness we do not buy one, it will hurt the government's feelings.' She also expressed gratitude for the budget's reductions of other non-essential appliances, like ceiling fans, declaring 'how thoughtful of the Finance Ministers'. Contractor utilises the image of the frivolous, middle class female consumer indulging in luxury products to explore the Emergency government's budget and economic measures, particularly around prices. Busybee quickly objects to his wife's insistence on the need for a spending spree: 'I said even though the excise duty was reduced, I could not afford the fans. I said that the money market continued to be tight and thought that I would impress her with high economic language, just as the people who offer their reactions to the budget always do.' Busybee's protestations remain unheard and he reveals, 'the shopping spree in our house continued'. His wife sides explicitly with the government: 'you are one of those who does not approve of anything that the government does. You criticise for the sake of criticising'. Within the family, the middle class housewife is the voice of support for the latest budget and the Emergency's wider economic agenda, and Contractor deploys and ridicules this figure in order to articulate his critique.¹⁴¹

The connections between broader and home economies and the dominance of middle class women in this was a critical facet of another Busybee column. In March 1976, he published advice for 'do it yourselfers', which appears particularly significant when read against authorities' persistent calls for women to contribute to the regime's economic

¹⁴⁰ *Femina*, 17.8 (9 April 1976) 59.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

priorities.¹⁴² He suggested that the 'housewife with a tight budget' might consider 'a few things she can make herself at home' and offered a number of suggestions. These included ironing wrapping paper, obtaining cactus plants by admiring those of your friends until they buy you a new cactus, making new dresses from husbands' old clothes, polishing silver with Indian whiskey and 'for handy repairs: find a husband who is good at handy repairs'.¹⁴³ In February 1977, Busybee offered more advice to readers on 'home economy: Busybee style'.¹⁴⁴ Amidst the proliferation of claims in the pre-election media about the regime's economic gains, Busybee recommended further ways that the housewife might consolidate these. The absurdity of the recommendations and the persistent satire of the role of the middle class housewife is explicit:

Re-use sixth month old bread: if you had left a load of bread in your bread box and locked the house and gone for a holiday to New York for six months, do not throw away the bread on your return. While in New York buy a fibre glass scraper (price five dollars), distilled water and peanut butter.

Such parodies of the elite woman and Contractor's use of these to comment on the national situation were part of a broader trend, and the archetype of this middle class housewife was commonly mobilised for this purpose. Nayantara Sahgal's novel *Rich Like Us* explores and criticises the Emergency on these terms. Readers are exposed to the regime primarily through its effects on the lives and perceptions of Sahgal's female characters and class considerations shape these from the novel's opening scene. Husband and wife Dev and Nishi, who run Dev's father's garment business, entertain a potential investor and business partner at their home. Nishi's character embodies the popular perception that businesses and the middle classes welcomed the Emergency as a period of efficiency and discipline. She tells their visitor, 'this Emergency is just what we needed...The way the country's being run now, with one person giving the orders, and no one being allowed to make a fuss...means things can go full steam ahead without delays'.

¹⁴² *Femina*, 17.6 (12 March 1976) 61.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Femina*, 18.4 (25 February 1977) 59.

She also celebrates that 'strikes are banned. It's going to be very good for business'.¹⁴⁵ Civil servant Sonali acts as the anti-thesis to Nivi's praise for the regime. The imposition of Emergency affects her profoundly, ending her career and quite literally making her ill. Class perspectives and divides are paramount in her subsequent reflections on the complicity of the civil service in the regime and its intrusions into people's lives. She describes the civil service as 'closer than a class. We were a club and we knew we could survive the blasts only if we pretended they weren't happening': 'so long as it didn't touch us, we played along.'¹⁴⁶

Sahgal fictionalises the trends in women's support for the Emergency that this chapter has discussed in detail. In one scene, Nivi leads a meeting of women, primarily businessmen and minister's wives, to plan their participation. Having forgotten to bring along her copy of the twenty-point programme, she resolved 'to do her best without it' and in any case, 'it was the spirit of the thing that mattered, getting the wives to pool their energies and to popularise the Emergency more and more. There was so much they could do, take groups to congratulate the Prime Minister, plant trees and prevent their servants from having children.'¹⁴⁷ This prominent item on their agenda underscores the schism between these women's participation in the regime and the experiences of lower class women. One of the wives reveals, 'I've threatened my *Ayah* (nanny) with dismissal more than once if she produces another child but she goes on popping out brats',¹⁴⁸ and the meeting concludes with a plan to arrange for 'one of those vans and have a vasectomy centre set up and get all our servants taken there on the same day'.¹⁴⁹ Sahgal caricatures the middle class, indulgent housewife and consumer in the same manner as *Busybee's* columns in her depiction of this meeting:

The room was full of dyed hair, imported skin fragrances and solid flesh of women long past forty whose summer saris, delicate as egg shells, seemed to

¹⁴⁵ Nayantara Sahgal, *Rich Like Us* (1985) (London: Sceptre, 1987) 10.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

have nothing to do with their bulging midriffs and sons in Gulf oil and the World Bank.¹⁵⁰

This feminine aesthetic of dyed hair, delicate saris and imported fragrances are crucial to Sahgal's critique and this was a common image in Kesava Shankara Pillai's *Shankar's Weekly*. Founded in 1948 this publication, which included a mixture of textual commentary and Shankar's cartoons, is renowned for its caricatures of all aspects of political life. The weekly ostensibly satirised this with the establishment's blessing, as Nehru famously told him 'don't spare me Shankar'.¹⁵¹ He spared neither Gandhi's Congress nor the JP-led opposition. In his comments on the Allahabad High Court's ruling, for instance, he criticised both sides for turning this legal debate into mere 'politicking', in which he insisted, 'what is being fouled by this political propaganda is not this person or that, not one party or another, but the entire system'.¹⁵²

Shankar's mobilisation of gendered narratives and particularly images of domesticity in his satire is useful for contextualising Contractor's emphasis on this in his *Busybee* columns. In her discussion of Shankar's early work, Ritu Gairola Khanduri highlights the importance of lipstick and other commodities in his cartoons' feminine aesthetic. Lipstick was his 'primary signifier for lip service', an image often used to illuminate the superficial and frivolous aspects of social and political life in the new nation.¹⁵³ Khandhuri also considers Shankar's recourse to the domestic sphere as a setting for his caricatures as 'the home and the world spatially demarcated arenas of significance for the new nation'.¹⁵⁴ She draws on the large body of literature on the centrality of women and domestic spaces in discourses of the Indian nation to explain Shankar's references to the home, and Contractor's utilisation of the domestic sphere to comment on the Emergency agenda must be situated in this context.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 87.

¹⁵¹ Rita Gairola Khanduri, *Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 110.

¹⁵² 'Free Thinking' *Shankar's Weekly*, 28.6 (22 June 1975) 1.

¹⁵³ Khanduri, *Caricaturing Culture*, 99.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Shankar's use of this gendered imagery highlights the class as well as gendered relations at play here:

Lipstick symbolised both empty lip service and the distorted aesthetic of city women, who misunderstood modernity and feminist activism. In these cartoons, educated women – the gendered youth of modern India – were a new threshold, of how education can lead young women astray and create 'superior women', who were out of touch with social reality and instead, by consuming commodities such as lipstick, high heeled shoes, bags and fashionable saris, painted an inglorious picture of the nation.¹⁵⁵

Shankar used the commodities of elite women to criticise aspects of national politics and to represent the rift between the lives of the privileged and the masses in independent India. Both *Shankar's Weekly's* and *Busybee's* use of these narratives to comment on the Emergency drew on well-established symbolism of the self-indulgent female consumer, which Tanika Sarkar observes in her analysis of women, domesticity and nationalism. She notes that responsible for household purchases and management, women 'served as the target of both nationalist appeal and blame'. Sarkar refers to a large body of writing and art that depicted the modern woman as self-indulgent and lazy: 'the archetypical evil woman of these times was not the immoral or the economically independent one, but one who, inspired by modern education, had exchanged sacred ritual objects...for foreign luxury ones.'¹⁵⁶

This archetype shaped *Busybee's* reflections on the home economy during the Emergency and women similarly embodied this economic agenda in some of Shankar's cartoons, as shown in figure 5.1.



¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 98.

¹⁵⁶ Sarkar, *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation*, 35.

Figure 5.1: 'Without price tags?' Cartoon from *Shankar's Weekly*, 31 August 1975¹⁵⁷

This image's caption explained that 'the Jaipur police have arrested a man for selling girls' without the Emergency's newly compulsory price tags. Whereas pro-Emergency forces underscored women's participation in this aspect of the regime, here women appear symbolically as the commodity. Like the Busybee family's comments on the economic programme, this representation resonates with the many critiques of the shallow nature of these Emergency measures and their failure to bring about real socio-economic change, given that police arrested this man for his failure to display prices rather than for selling girls.

The domestic, marital relationship also shaped *Shankar's Weekly's* comments on other aspects of the Emergency. Figure 5.2 appeared in the weekly in August 1975, captioned, 'there was a raid for black money in our house yesterday. My husband took away all the money I had hidden in the kitchen.'



Figure 5.2: Cartoon from *Shankar's Weekly*, 3 August 1975¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ *Shankar's Weekly*, 28.16 (31 August 1975) 7.

¹⁵⁸ *Shankar's Weekly*, 28.12 (3 August 1975) 21.

The women pictured in figure 5.2 embody the kind of feminine aesthetic that was prominent in Shankar's commentary on the nation, with their 'lipstick, high heeled shoes, bags and fashionable saris'.¹⁵⁹ He utilised this aesthetic to comment on the crackdown on black money, a key aspect of the Emergency and its economic agenda. The same issue of the weekly drew upon domestic, marital relationships to criticise the regime's rhetoric on law and order. As discussed in chapter three, pro-Emergency forces often foregrounded an increase in student safety and crackdown on the practice of ragging on university campuses as one of the Emergency's achievements. Shankar published the image shown in figure 5.3 by cartoonist Ramakrishna along with the caption 'Oh! It's only ragging that's been banned, not nagging!'



Figure 5.3: Ramakrishna cartoon from *Shankar's Weekly*, 3 August 1975¹⁶⁰

This domestic scene posited nagging wives as a rampant problem, but one that the Emergency crackdown was not tackling. Again, Shankar used images and stereotypes of women's roles within the family and home space in this satire on the regime's measures.

Both Contractor's and Shankar's commentaries were not confined to the Emergency government and the organised opposition also came under scrutiny. *Femina's* first issue of May 1977 reported, 'Busybee's wife finds a new status symbol – or, rather, the lack of one'.¹⁶¹ The column commented on the clamour to voice Emergency experiences and participate in the construction of the post-Emergency counter narrative, utilising

¹⁵⁹ Kandhuri, *Caricaturing Culture in India*, 98.

¹⁶⁰ *Shankar's Weekly*, 28.12 (3 August 1975) 17.

¹⁶¹ *Femina*, 18.9 (6 May 1977) 63.

stereotypical images of the middle class housewife as a gossip. *Busybee's* wife appears jealous that 'during the Emergency, our neighbour's phone was tapped all the time' and as a result, 'his wife had so many interesting stories to tell'. She despairs that 'meanwhile you have nothing to tell. Not once even a comma in your article was censored'. *Busybee* retorts that 'several of my articles were censored, but I do not want to brag about it'. Contractor mocks the political and social capital to be gained from the Emergency experience through this exchange between husband and wife, as the latter exclaims: 'the stories that his wife has got to tell about those hard days':

If you had been imprisoned for just one month, you could have written a nice prison diary, revealing all the bad treatment given to you, worse than in British jails. We could have given autographed copies to all our neighbours and the rest of the copies we would have sold...you could have gone to America and given lectures in universities there. But you did not even have the presence of mind to keep a passport ready.¹⁶²

Contractor's columns and Shankar's cartoons demonstrate that ideas about women's domestic roles and the home space shaped representations of the State of Emergency, its politics and its measures. The fact that *Busybee* appeared in *Femina* also suggests that the magazine's middle class, female readership engaged with these issues. Neither *Femina* nor *Shankar's Weekly* explicitly situated itself in opposition to Gandhi's Emergency. Indeed, both the *Busybee* columns and Shankar's cartoons often ridiculed both Gandhi's government and the actions of the JP-led opposition. However, their caricatures represent an act of resistance. Although not always in complete opposition to Gandhi's leadership or in solidarity with the organised opposition, they resisted the regime's repressions on freedom of speech. Both caricatured and questioned elements of the regime and its policies through their comical sketches and, given the Emergency government's discursive dominance, this must be read as an act of dissent.

Contractor criticised the Emergency's censorship and Shankar decided to close his weekly in September 1975, just a few months into the regime. Communicating this decision to readers in July, Shankar emphasised being overworked and understaffed: 'I have been

¹⁶² Ibid.

running this Weekly without a break. But this is too much for one man. Time has now come when I find it a great strain to continue the journal.¹⁶³ Anti and pro-Emergency forces offered polarised interpretations for the weekly's demise. *Swaraj* claimed that 'he has preferred to close down rather than be gagged by the censorship in India',¹⁶⁴ but pro-Emergency *India Today* offered a different perspective. It highlighted Gandhi's statement that 'we shall miss this journal' and insisted, 'Shankar emphatically denies that his weekly had to close down because of the Emergency, "we could have taken the Emergency in our stride, but the burden of running a weekly magazine on a shoe string was too much"', he ostensibly told the magazine.¹⁶⁵ However, Shankar's frustrations with elements of the Emergency and particularly its censorship were evident in the weekly's final issue, which stressed that its purpose was 'to make our readers laugh' and lamented the lack of humour in the current political climate: 'Dictatorships cannot afford laughter because people may laugh at the dictator, and that wouldn't do. In all the years of Hitler, there was never a good cartoon, not a good parody, or a spoof. From this point the world, and sadly enough India, have become grimmer. Language itself has become functional.'¹⁶⁶

This chapter demonstrates that the home functioned as a politicised space that was embroiled in these parodies and the politics of Emergency. Private, domestic spaces, activities within them, or activities rooted in domestic roles and discourses, were frequently shaped by the Emergency regime. Those involved in the underground resistance movement utilised their homes for oppositional activities, and women's domestic roles often framed their support for the regime. The Emergency intruded into these private spaces, which also provided a platform for satirical explorations of the regime and its measures. The evidence put forth in this chapter challenges dominant understandings about Emergency politics and the spaces in which this manifested. Looking towards a variety of spaces such as the home further illuminates women's engagements with the regime and the gendered narratives

¹⁶³ 'Farewell' *Shankar's Weekly*, 28.11 (27 July 1975).

¹⁶⁴ 'Humour is dead, so is *Shankar's Weekly*' *Swaraj*, No. 10. in Basu, *Underground Literature*, 65.

¹⁶⁵ Mandira Purie, 'Shankar's Weekly Leaves a Gap' *India Today* (15 December 1975) 24.

¹⁶⁶ 'Farewell' *Shankar's Weekly*, 28.16 (31 August 1975) 1.

utilised to represent it. Whilst making a case for understanding the Emergency in the context of the home space and domesticity, this chapter has also underscored the fluidity of the gendered divisions between public and private spheres, as this space, domestic roles and popular perceptions of these were highly politicised during this period.

Chapter Six: Spaces of Emergency II: The prison

Prisons across India were critical sites upon which Emergency politics played out, as Gandhi's government used preventive detention on an unprecedented scale. Authorities arrested and detained political leaders, opposition party members, journalists, individuals connected with banned organisations and other citizens who criticised the regime. Horror stories of torture, poor prison conditions and a lack of legal redress for political prisoners abound. This chapter considers alternative narratives of Emergency incarceration, ones that locate the prison as an important site in the landscape of women's resistance. Drawing primarily from letters sent to and from women detained across Maharashtra that have not been analysed in previous scholarship, it explores their positive constructions of physical and social jail spaces and connects these to their anti-Emergency politics. The chapter offers new insights into the scale of women's imprisonment during this period and into their daily routines during incarceration. It also considers what these routines and reflections on them reveal about their opposition to Gandhi's government, and the gendered relations of women's experiences of preventive detention and anti-Emergency activism.

The chapter engages with scholarship in carceral geography that positions prisons as 'connected rather than detached spaces, with permeable boundaries and highly significant internal geographies', upon which acts of prisoner agency, as well as exertions of disciplinary power, are mapped out.¹ It draws on the history of preventive detention in India in order to think about the specific constructions of prison spaces for political, rather than convict, prisoners. I assess the state of existing scholarship on preventive detention under the Emergency and where women figure in this. The chapter then explores women's experiences of detention in Maharashtra, focusing on positive narratives that foreground the relative freedom of jails' physical characteristics and the intense social relationships formed between detainees. Finally, I discuss these prisons' permeable boundaries, their

¹ Dominique Moran, *Carceral Geography: Spaces and Practices of Incarceration* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015) 10.

connections to the underground network and their position as a critical space in the geography of anti-Emergency activism.

6.1 Political prisoners and carceral spaces

Political imprisonment, where people are ‘incarcerated for the threat of their ideas’ and for breaking ‘the unspoken prohibition against disagreement with a hegemonic power’, was a defining feature of the Emergency.² Political prisoners occupied jails across the country in great numbers, but the government’s recourse to preventive detention to repress opposition was not new. These policies have complex histories, which shaped the nature of the penal system and spaces in which Gandhi’s government detained people. ‘Political prisoner’ emerged formally as a category during colonial rule, when jails were sites of contestation between colonial authorities and the nationalist movement. Ujjwal Kumar Singh argues, ‘imprisonment became the major bulwark of the colonial state’s strategy for harnessing recalcitrant subjects’.³ British authorities arrested nationalist leaders and people involved in both militant and non-violent protests in their attempts to subdue unrest. Nationalist protestors dominated Indian jails, as David Arnold notes, ‘the prison came to be colonised by middle class nationalists from the 1890s onwards’.⁴

However, the power relations embedded in these incarcerations were not entirely hegemonic. Preventive detention was partly an exercise of colonial power, but prisons also emerged as battlegrounds in the nationalist movement. Courting arrest was a critical aspect of its strategy and actual jail going was a firm feature of the movement’s political culture, entangled with its discourses around sacrifice and morality. Political prisoners also engaged in protests, especially hunger strikes, often subverting colonial authorities and

² Gerald A. Hauser, *Prisoners of Conscience: Moral Vernaculars of Political Agency* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2012) 3.

³ Ujjwal Kumar Singh, *Political Prisoners in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) 7.

⁴ David Arnold, ‘The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge and Penology in Nineteenth Century India’ in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds.) *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) 155.

prison institutions.⁵ The subsequent glorification of jail going meant that within the nationalist movement and immediately after the transfer of power, having spent time as a political prisoner often functioned as a form of political capital. The experience was viewed as evidence of the 'conviction of the need to suffer, to go to prison for freedom, and to have strength to experience the horrors of life'. The INC and other parties 'organised relief for political victims, and idealised prisoners, their courage, their principles and their boldness'.⁶ The prison space during the first half of the twentieth century was highly politicised and located at 'the intersection of the colonial state's strategy for restraint and the nationalist strategy of protest'.⁷

Scholarship and popular narratives often position preventive detention as a defining aspect of colonial power and the struggle against it in India. This period cemented the category of political prisoner but jails were also home to popular revolt and conflicts with the colonial state in the previous century. As David Arnold argues:

While there has been a tendency in the past to see prison protests as essentially a mark of the period of nationalist incarceration, particularly from 1920 onwards, the more one explores the history of the nineteenth century prison in India the more frequent such episodes of resistance appear and the more significant they seem in the evolution of colonial penology.⁸

Arnold's emphasis on these episodes and his assessment of what they reveal about penal systems, disciplinary power mechanisms and spaces of punishment relates to wider trends in theorising the prison space. Michel Foucault's often cited *Discipline and Punish* has been at the forefront of scholarship on prison institutions and power relations. His history of punishment in the eighteenth century mapped out new processes that disciplined the body

⁵ Both memoirs from political prisoners and official records reveal acts of resistance within colonial prisons (Singh, *Political Prisoners*, 8). Mushirul Hasan describes how 1500 detainees held at Yerwada Jail in Maharashtra for their participation in the 1942 Quit India Movement went on hunger strike to demand fair treatment and facilities. See *Roads to Freedom: Prisoners in Colonial India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016) 144-145. Taylor C. Sherman analyses the hunger strikes undertaken by a group of revolutionary prisoners detained during the nationalist movement belonging to the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. She underscores the novel forms of resistance adopted by these prisoners and how their hunger strikes, as sacrifices, propelled this group to the forefront of the movement. See 'State Practice, Nationalist Politics and the Hunger Strikes of the Lahore Conspiracy Case Prisoners, 1929-39' *Cultural and Social History*, 5.4 (2008) 497-508.

⁶ Hasan, *Roads to Freedom*, 243.

⁷ Singh, *Political Prisoners*, 8.

⁸ Arnold, 'The Colonial Prison', 150.

in contrast to earlier uses of physical torture.⁹ Foucault charted the emergence of new methods, 'which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility';¹⁰ a series of disciplinary institutions and processes that produced 'docile bodies'.¹¹ He utilised Jeremy Bentham's panopticon prison design to elucidate this theory of disciplinary techniques. Through the regulation of space, segregation of individual bodies and the constant possibility of surveillance, Foucault found in panopticism a disciplinary model that spread throughout the social body.¹²

Although not confined to penal institutions, the theory's exploration of discipline, Foucault's use of prison architecture, and his situation of the justice system as an 'exhaustive disciplinary apparatus' secured its prominence in scholarship conceptualising prisons from various disciplines.¹³ His theories on the biopolitics of punishment have been utilised extensively in analyses of prison authorities and the power that they exert over prisoners' bodies. Recent debates in criminology have shifted to assess the influence of prisoners on the prison space and penal mechanisms, emphasising 'prisoner agency and resistance within an environment that is dominated by immense power inequalities'.¹⁴ Such alternative conceptions of prison institutions argue that penal disciplinary power relations are not hegemonic, but contingent. As Mary Bosworth asserts, 'prisons are sites of great power inequalities...These relations of domination and subordination are not, however, fixed. Rather, prison life is characterised by ongoing negotiations of power'.¹⁵

David Arnold highlights many examples that contrast Foucault's view of prison discipline. The nineteenth century colonial jail was replete with 'episodes of resistance, of

⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 3-69.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹² *Ibid.*, 195-228.

¹³ Foucault follows his analysis of the panopticon design with a broader discussion of the prison as the disciplinary institution *par excellence* (*Ibid.*, 231-256).

¹⁴ Rebecca Godderis, 'Dining in: The Symbolic Power of Food in Prison' *The Howard Journal*, 45.3 (2006) 256-257.

¹⁵ Mary Bosworth, 'Reassessing Resistance: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Prison' *Punishment and Society*, 3.4 (2001) 501.

“revolts against the gaze” which suggest that the prisoners were far from being the “docile bodies” Foucault describes’.¹⁶ These relations were particularly fluid for political, rather than convict, prisoners.¹⁷ Examples of this fluidity from the Indian context resonate with a recent body of scholarship on carceral geography.¹⁸ Geographical perspectives on imprisonment are well suited to understanding the experiences of political prisoners, especially those detained for relatively short periods, as they move away from temporal interpretations of imprisonment in terms of life cycles.¹⁹ Geographical analyses of prisons also offer unique insights into the kinds of ‘revolts against the gaze’ that often shape political prisoners’ experiences. Although still underpinned by Foucault’s biopolitical theories, ‘geographers engage with the notion of agency within carceral space, identifying ways in which those confined within these spaces may resist regimes of incarceration and deploy spatial strategies to access and express agency’.²⁰ This body of work acknowledges the importance of prison design and the built environment in shaping incarceration,²¹ conceptualises the capacity for mobility within prisons and questions the impermeable nature of their boundaries.²²

These perspectives resonate with analyses of resistance in colonial jails and with my findings, set out later in this chapter, about women’s experiences of preventive detention

¹⁶ Arnold, ‘The Colonial Prison’, 150.

¹⁷ Singh’s study *Political Prisoners in India* and Hasan’s *Roads to Freedom* persistently locate the prisoners as agents of resistance against the colonial state, both because of their participation in activities that led to their arrest and their engagement in resistance activities, such as hunger strikes, within jails.

¹⁸ See, for example, this collection of essays edited by Dominique Moran, Nick Gill and Deirdre Conlon: *Carceral Spaces: Mobility and Agency in Imprisonment and Migrant Detention* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

¹⁹ Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 10-11.

²⁰ Ibid., 18. Introducing a collection of essays on carceral space and agency, criminologist Yvonne Jewkes notes, ‘My impression is that geographers look for the positives in the carceral experience a little more than criminologists do.’ Although criminologists have observed agency, counter narratives and resistance in prisons, she claims, ‘we tend to emphasise the “depth”, “weight” and “tightness” of imprisonment (Crewe 2011), its inherent “pains” and “deprivations” (Sykes 1958) and society’s deep cultural attachment to incarceration.’ Although the geographical essays she introduces also highlight themes of brutality, solitary confinement, arbitrary and indefinite detention, ‘they also present to quote another contributor – “dynamic [carceral] spaces replete with temporal flows and social encounters that defy absolutist conceptions of prison as a monolithic capsule of space and time” (McWatters)’. See Jewkes, ‘On Carceral Space and Agency’ in *Carceral Spaces*, 127.

²¹ ‘Prison Buildings and the Design of Carceral Space’ in *Carceral Geography*, 113-128.

²² ‘Inside/Outside and the Contested Prison Boundary’, Ibid., 87-102.

under the Emergency in Maharashtra. However, preventive detention in independent India has rarely been conceptualised in this manner partly because, according to Singh, ‘unlike the colonial period when jail going was a manifestation of the dominant political culture’, after independence it represented ‘the inability of the government to cultivate a culture of deliberation and debate’.²³ Conflicts between the ruling government and opposition continued to play out across jails after the transfer of power in 1947. The Congress Party, as the dominant group in the nationalist movement and this transfer, ‘claimed the authority to define what constituted “national”’, and successive governments adopted new preventive detention legislation citing the need to maintain law, order and the party’s vision of national progress:²⁴

As broad sections of the population moved to political activity, the government took recourse to legal and extra-legal measures of repression, so much so that legality and constitutionalism, which were integral to the nationalist critique of the colonial state, seemed to dissipate in the face of this emerging crisis of legitimacy.²⁵

On 25 February 1950, the Congress dominated Parliament passed its first Preventive Detention Act. This was part of the government’s reaction to labour unrest and peasant rebellions led by the Communist Party in Telangana over land distribution.²⁶ It allowed authorities to detain citizens to protect public order, national security and the maintenance of supplies.²⁷ Multiple amendments extended the life of this Act so that far from being an extraordinary measure, it became ‘a normal feature of Indian political life’ until allowed to lapse in 1969.²⁸ As well as facilitating preventive detention, it allowed for the non-disclosure of the grounds for arrest to the detainee and enabled the government to detain individuals

²³ Singh, *Political Prisoners*, 210-211.

²⁴ Ibid., 205.

²⁵ Ibid., 206.

²⁶ Niloufer Bhagwat records that the then Home Minister Vallabhbhai Patel ‘explained that labour trouble and the Telangana movement led by the Communist Party necessitated the introduction of the measure’. See ‘Institutionalising Detention without Trial’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13.11 (1978) 511.

²⁷ Pradyumna K. Tripathi, ‘Preventive Detention: The Indian Experience’ *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 9.2 (1960) 221-222.

²⁸ Ujjwal Kumar Singh, ‘The Silent Erosion: Anti-Terror Laws and Shifting Contours of Jurisprudence in India’ *Diogenes*, 212 (2006) 121.

for a year without consulting relevant Advisory Boards and indefinitely if Boards were consulted.

Several other legal measures for preventive detention followed.²⁹ In 1971, Gandhi's government passed the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), which renewed its emphasis on law, order and security. It justified the Act on the grounds that it needed to protect national interests as tensions with Pakistan escalated and in order to tackle Naxalite rebellions.³⁰ In early December, the President proclaimed a further Emergency as war broke out with Pakistan and adopted the Defence of India Rules (1971) (DIR). This introduced changes to MISA making it more stringent under these Emergency circumstances. For instance, it provided that detentions must be referred to the Advisory Board within three months, rather than thirty days, and increased the maximum period of detention from one to three years.³¹

Singh notes that this successive legislation institutionalising preventive detention demonstrates an 'emerging trend of "extraordinariness"'.³² The Emergency government's recourse to extraordinary measures were part of this trend, but its use of preventive detention also had some unique elements. Anand Patwardhan's documentary film *Prisoners of Conscience* described 1975-1977 as a period where 'repression reached new heights in India'.³³ Using interviews, the documentary underscores the brutality, poor facilities and even torture experienced by Emergency detainees. MISA also assumed 'formidable proportions' after the declaration of Emergency and the number of individuals arrested increased significantly. The Shah Commission reported that authorities detained 34,988 people under MISA and 75,818 under DIR. After June 1975, a much larger group of

²⁹ These included the Defence of India Ordinance (later Act), passed in October 1962 because of war with China, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (1968). See Omar, *Emergency Powers and the Courts*, 85; Singh, *Political Prisoners*, 212.

³⁰ Hallie Ludsom, *Preventive Detention and the Democratic State* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 106-107.

³¹ Singh, *Political Prisoners*, 213; Bhagwat, 'Institutionalising Detention Without Trial', 511.

³² Singh, *Political Prisoners*, 214.

³³ Anand Patwardhan, *Prisoners of Conscience* (1978)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHFaEybyvNA> (accessed March 2016).

people faced the threat of arrest as mainstream opposition parties fell under the umbrella of what the Emergency government defined as ‘anti-national’. It also noted that criticising government policy became sufficient grounds for issuing a detention order and authorities regularly passed these orders simply because a person was sympathetic towards a banned organisation or opposition party.³⁴

State/Union Territory	Detentions under MISA	Arrests under DIR
Andhra Pradesh	1135	451
Assam	533	2388
Bihar	2360	7747
Gujarat	1762	2643
Haryana	200	1079
Himachal Pradesh	34	654
Jammu & Kashmir	466	311
Karnataka	487	4015
Kerala	790	7134
Madhya Pradesh	5620	2521
Maharashtra	5473	9799
Manipur	231	228
Meghalaya	39	20
Nagaland	95	4
Orissa	408	762
Punjab	440	2423
Rajasthan	542	1352
Sikkim	4	-
Tamil Nadu	1027	1644
Tripura	77	99
Uttar Pradesh	6956	24781
West Bengal	4992	2547
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	41	88
Arunachal Pradesh	-	1
Chandigarh	27	74
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	-	3
Delhi	1012	2851
Goa, Daman & Diu	113	-
Lakshadweep	-	-
Mizoram	70	136
Pondicherry	54	63
Total	34988	75818

Table 6.1: Arrests and Detentions in various States/Union Territories during Emergency³⁵

³⁴ SCI, *Third and Final Report*, 42.

³⁵ Ibid., 134.

The subsequent influx of prisoners and the jails' limited physical facilities were important factors in determining detainees' experiences of imprisonment. The Shah Commission reported that prior to Gandhi's imposition of Emergency, Indian jails had a population of 220, 146, against a capacity for 183,369.³⁶ It further noted that many prison buildings were ill-equipped, lacking proper sanitation, water supply and other facilities. Given that the physical organisation of prisons across the country was already rife with problems, 'the declaration of Emergency aggravated a situation, which was already bad, in terms of capacity for accommodation and the infrastructure for looking after the prisoners/detenues'.³⁷ The unprecedented influx of high profile political leaders, the largest since before independence, combined with these physical challenges meant that detainees were often not housed in separate conditions with better treatment than convict prisoners, as was standard practice according to preventive detention legislation.³⁸ The Commission's reports on detention conditions underscored overcrowding and inadequate, or obstructed, access to facilities like healthcare, sanitation, reasonable food and communications in the form of interviews and letters.³⁹ The Emergency government also made several changes to MISA through Presidential Ordinances.⁴⁰ The Shah Commission concluded that 'these

³⁶ Ibid., 135.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Typically, political prisoners were categorised into three classes (A, B or C) and allowed additional facilities depending on their classification. The Emergency saw a vast increase in A-class prisoners as the government arrested prominent leaders of the non-CPI opposition parties, including JP and future Janata Prime Minister Moraji Desai. Singh notes that 'the principle of classification in most states almost always reflected a political culture in which privileged status was accorded to those who had at some stage held political office' (*Political Prisoners*, 243).

³⁹ SCI, *Third and Final Report*, 135-152.

⁴⁰ A few days into the regime, the government added Section 16 A and several special provisions for 'dealing' with Emergency. This allowed authorities 'to detain anyone without assigning grounds for a maximum period of one year' and deemed it unnecessary to disclose grounds of detention to detainees, 'Detention without grounds for 1 year: Ordinance issued to amend MISA' *Times of India* (1 July 1975, 1. Further amendments ensured that no one 'detained under the act can claim the right to personal liberty by virtue of natural or common law' or move courts for relief: 'MISA further tightened' *Times of India* (17 July 1975); 'Detenues cannot move court' *Times of India* (28 June 1975). A MISA (Amendment) Act passed on 5 August 1975 replaced these ordinances and cemented their provisions and the 39th Constitutional (Amendment) Act, September 1975, further placed MISA above judicial review. Another Amendment Act passed in January 1976 deemed the grounds of detention under Section 16A as 'confidential' and denied detainees the opportunity to make representations against their arrest through courts, a change that was endorsed by a Supreme Court ruling a few months later, 'Detenues can't move courts for enforcement of rights' *The Hindu* (1 May 1976).

amendments completely metamorphosed the character of MISA'. It argued that the removal of its principal safeguards including juridical scrutiny, case reviews and communication of the full grounds of detention 'led directly to the large scale abuse and misuse of powers during the Emergency'.⁴¹

6.2 Locating women within the Emergency's prisons

Scholarship and commentary on women's experiences of these measures tend to cite isolated examples relating to exceptional women and position the prison primarily as a site of repression where Gandhi's government exerted its Emergency powers. For female nationalists detained in UP in the 1920s, Suruchi Thapar-Björkert argues that 'women's experiences in jail can be placed into two categories: the prison as a site of humiliation and separation from family, and prison as a site of female community and resistance'.⁴² Existing evidence usually falls within the first category, revealing instances of sexual violence and poor facilities arising from the gendered spatial segregation of political prisoners. These narratives often position women primarily as victims, and fail to connect their location in prisons with the activism or anti-Emergency stances for which they were detained.

Physical space is a critical level at which the institutional power of prisons operates. Architecture and design 'communicate the aims and techniques of penal authority, shape the lived experience of imprisonment, and impact on the working environment of prison staff as well as the lives of prisoners'.⁴³ As Foucault's use of the panopticon demonstrates, architecture is a key element of disciplinary power structures.⁴⁴ Several women's prison diaries suggest that a lack of designated space affected female detainees' experiences of detention during the Emergency.⁴⁵ Delhi authorities arrested social worker Primila Lewis for

⁴¹ SCI, *Third and Final Report*, 40.

⁴² Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, 'Gender, nationalism and the colonial jail: a study of women activists in Uttar Pradesh' *Women's History Review*, 7.4 (1998) 583-615.

⁴³ Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 125.

⁴⁴ See Paul Hirst's chapter 'Foucault and Architecture' in *Space and Power: Politics, War and Architecture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005) 155-178.

⁴⁵ As with many other elements, this was not unique to the Emergency. Arnold notes that 'for most of the nineteenth century, however, because there were so few women in jail, little provision was

her role in organising agricultural workers' protests on farms in Mehrauli in Delhi. Her diary recorded how in Tihar Jail, the Assistant Superintendent's office was given to female political prisoners, 'but for any more than two politicals there was room only in the cells or barracks'.⁴⁶ Authorities also housed Rajmata of Jaipur and Swatantra Party MP Gayatri Devi in Tihar, after arresting her and her son Bhawani Singh under the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and the Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act (1974). She asserted that 'the men's part of the prison was properly equipped', whereas the absence of a segregated space for female detainees meant that authorities held her in makeshift facilities not intended for detention: 'a small building with a room and a veranda, which was actually used by the visiting doctors. It had an open sewer running along its side filling the air with a putrid stench.'⁴⁷ Devi appealed to Tihar's Superintendent to use outside space and 'he said it would be possible in the evenings after the male prisoners had been locked up'.⁴⁸ These issues were exacerbated when authorities transferred Rajmata of Gwalior and Jana Sangh member Vijaya Raje Scindia there. Devi describes how 'the Superintendent decided that the only available space was the cell for condemned prisoners' and he oversaw the latrine demolished, floor laid, a window built, walls whitewashed and a light installed ready for her arrival.⁴⁹

Emergency authorities arrested film star Snehalata Reddy because of her connections to Socialist Party leaders. Commentators often highlighted her case as evidence of the Emergency's excesses because she died five days after her release from Bangalore Central Prison. Reddy's family posthumously published her prison diary, which depicts her health's deterioration and inadequate medical treatment. On 22 July 1976 she recorded, 'really passed out. Matter of minutes. Pulse failed. Blacked out many times. Nothing.' Her 26 July entry claimed 'they haven't examined me or checked my heart

made for their separate accommodation and supervision, and they were often relegated to the worst parts of the jail'. See 'The Colonial Prison', 167.

⁴⁶ Lewis, *Reason Wounded*, 105.

⁴⁷ Devi, *A Princess Remembers*, 371

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 374.

pressure...my serious condition is entirely the responsibility of the jail authorities – they prevented me from going to hospital in the initial stages...have they no shame?'.⁵⁰ As well as documenting this negligent treatment, Reddy's diary detailed how Bangalore Central Prison lacked the appropriate space for a female MISA detainee. Separated from the male political prisoners detained there, jail authorities housed her on the female ward with convicts and she did not receive the additional privileges to which she was entitled. A diary entry in August 1976 recorded, 'I'm kept in ignorance of the MISA rules. No business to shut me up with the class C prisoners without air or even a window to look into the jail compound. They could easily convert a room for me near MISA A or B.' This gendered spatial segregation was, Reddy felt, an integral part of her punishment: 'if he [the Jail Superintendent] put me alongside the MISA people he couldn't get away with anything. Every one of them is a gentleman and would have looked after me.'⁵¹

Primila Lewis's diary, which depicts her incarceration within several jails, indicates the importance of physical space in shaping her experiences. Arriving at Ambala Central Prison in Haryana, Lewis recorded that she 'expected the worst in overcrowding, dirt, brutality, rape, harassment and torture. But instead, here at Ambala at any rate conditions were decent, well ordered and clean.'⁵² Her positive depictions of detention, which oscillated partly around the jail's physical environment, contrast the brutal and torturous experiences that characterise many narratives of Emergency imprisonment. She described the prison yard as idyllic, full of flowers, trees and birds: 'It was more of an *ashram* than a jail; only the iron bars and padlocks, the clanking doors and the uniformed, baton wielding warders were visible evidence otherwise.' She also underscored the women political prisoners' relative physical freedom, describing 'our walk around the yard after dinner' in which 'we listened to the prisoners (who were locked up between 6am and 6pm everyday)'.⁵³ This starkly contrasted her experience in Rohtak District Jail, Haryana. Conflicts with state authorities

⁵⁰ Reddy, *A Prison Diary*, 5-6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁵² Lewis, *Reason Wounded*, 106.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 104.

punctuate Lewis's narrative of her time there, which she described as 'punitive rather than preventive'.⁵⁴ Both political and convict prisoners were denied use of the open grounds and detained in what she described as a 'glorified cattle shed...bleak, grim and sterile'.⁵⁵

The physical inadequacies of prisons were critical to an All Bengal Women's Association's (ABWA) report on the poor facilities faced by female prisoners in West Bengal's Presidency Jail during the Emergency. Journalist Kalyan Chaudhuri cited 'staggering' overcrowding as a 'constant source of irritation and frayed tempers between prisoners and jail staff, resulting in violent clashes inside jails'.⁵⁶ This influenced the ABWA's condemnations, which it submitted to Janata Home Minister Charan Singh, 'drawing his attention to the horrible conditions of the female wards in West Bengal jails'. Chaudhuri emphasised inadequate physical arrangements, reporting that 'in Presidency Jail, the female ward is situated in the extreme corner of the jail', locked up at all times and known to its detainees as 'a jail within a jail'. The group of political, mainly Naxalite, prisoners detained on this top floor were 'never allowed to come downstairs' and constantly watched by warders.⁵⁷

Chaudhuri's discussion of the ABWA report also noted that 'the special feature of the female ward in Presidency Jail and in all other female wards of West Bengal jails is the practice of prostitution. This is done with the active participation of the police, court clerks and a section of the convicts', as women 'have to pay heavy bribes to the police and the court clerks to avoid long confinement in jails'.⁵⁸ Primila Lewis identified the same systems of sexual exploitation in Rohtak, recording that a constable offered an undertrial prisoner bail in return for sex: 'this we learned was a routine occurrence. Single warders or policemen would offer to stand bail for the feckless young girls knowing that they were runaways,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 154.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁶ Kalyan Chaudhuri, 'Women Prisoners in Presidency Jail' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12.19 (1977) 755.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

orphans without help, in return for a temporary cohabitation.⁵⁹ Some political prisoners also experienced threats of gendered violence and harassment during the Emergency. Chaudhuri recorded that Presidency Jail warders 'harass the Naxalite prisoners in many ways', citing the example of one girl who police raped while in custody and 'during her interrogation was constantly teased about the loss of her virginity'.⁶⁰

Patwardhan's *Prisoners of Conscience* features an interview with husband and wife Dev Nathan and Vasanthi Raman. Vasanthi described her arrest after participating in anti-Emergency activism with a student group at Mumbai University, where she worked as a teacher.⁶¹ The Assistant Police Commissioner and three other officers questioned Vasanthi at a police station in the city. She revealed, 'within in fact half an hour of arriving into the office the Andhra police officers threatened to rape me and they said that unless I talked they would not let me go and they would see that I was broken in'.⁶² These narratives conform to a Foucauldian reading of the prison as a space where power is exercised over the body. They tend to characterise the experiences of men and women belonging to the Emergency's banned organisations. These groups generally received worse treatment during their incarceration than leaders or members of mainstream opposition parties. The experiences of the latter point towards the need to reconsider Singh's claim that preventive detention in independent India did not reflect a 'dominant political culture' in relation to this period and the emergence of the Janata Party.⁶³ Most of those who took office in the Janata government had spent time in prison under the Emergency so imprisonment under the regime did, to some extent, reflect a dominant political culture after March 1977.

Patwardhan's film featured few women's narratives and only included Vasanthi's to supplement her husband's. Dev speaks for over two minutes, Vasanthi for less than twenty seconds. Her story is heard only because it is part of the sequence of events that constitute

⁵⁹ Lewis, *Reason Wounded*, 110.

⁶⁰ Chaudhuri, 'Women Prisoners in Presidency Jail', 756.

⁶¹ These contextual details, which I discovered during an interview with Vasanthi in October 2014, are actually completely absent from Patwardhan's film.

⁶² Patwardhan, *Prisoners of Conscience*.

⁶³ Singh, *Political Prisoners*, 210.

his detention, as he asserts, 'at this point they then arrested my wife.'⁶⁴ This is a common feature of references to women's Emergency imprisonment in documentary evidence. Underground literature often cited their arrests exclusively in relation to men's or to underscore the regime's brutality. *Satya Samachar* recorded that four women in Bangalore, 'all relatives of MISA detainees and one male worker of the LSS observed a protest fast near the bus stand' and were detained by police.⁶⁵ Another issue reported that on the declaration's anniversary, 'fearing popular protests the police raided some 500 houses in Delhi and combed some important centres of the opposition in a bid to round up activists'. It recorded:

The midnight raids started four days earlier than June 26...Ladies were detained in police stations for hours together in a bid to get them to disclose the whereabouts of their menfolk. Thus the police set a new record of harassment in a bid to crush the people's sentiments.⁶⁶

The bulletin removes any agency in its depiction of these women's arrests. It reported them only in relation to their 'menfolk' and to highlight the government's brutality and recourse to harassment.

LSS reports also suggest that authorities did not detain arrested women. Its piece on protests at the Bangalore bus stand claimed that after holding them in custody, authorities imprisoned the male *satyagrahi* and released the four women.⁶⁷ Another on protests in Mumbai reported that *Smt* Malati Narawere, Chief of a Jana Sangh women's group, courted arrest at Shivaji Mandir bus station on 25 November with eleven other women. The LSS claimed, 'though the batch was exclusively ladies, the Bombay police played a joke by arresting *Shri* Gokhale who was witnessing the *satyagraha*'. When *Smt* Narawere highlighted the error, he 'argued with her that he was in agreement with their demands and would not be released though the police had wrongly arrested him'.⁶⁸ This

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ LSS, *Satya Samachar* (26 June 1976) Press Clippings File No. 15, JP papers, NMML.

⁶⁶ LSS, 'June 26: Jitters to the Dictator' *Satya Samachar* (12 July 1976) Press Clippings File No. 15, JP papers, NMML.

⁶⁷ LSS, *Satya Samachar* (26 June 1976).

⁶⁸ LSS, Mumbai Review of Satyagraha (20 December 1975) Subject Files No. 315, JP Papers, NMML.

suggests a reluctance to arrest women and bystander *Shri* Gokhale's actions, rather than these women's anti-Emergency protest, becomes the report's focus.

Underground literature referenced Mrinal Gore's arrest in December 1975: '*Smt* Mrinal Gore, the symbol of great courage and monumental defiance finally fell into the hands of the police at Bandra'.⁶⁹ The LSS utilised this example of a woman's incarceration to criticise Emergency authorities through a distinctly gendered condemnation: 'In International Women's Year, Shankarrao [Chavan, Chief Minister of Maharashtra] has really shown a great chivalry. Fie on you Shankarrao.'⁷⁰ Gore's detention in Akola District Prison alongside convict prisoners including 'a leper and a lunatic', which became the subject of a writ petition in Mumbai's High Court, received regular coverage in underground bulletins. A protest letter sent by fellow detainee *Shri* Prabhubhai Sanghvi to Gandhi similarly claimed, 'it is a matter of shame that after celebrating the IWY, with such a fanfare, a selfless and dedicated political worker and vigilant legislator like Ms Gore should have received such inhuman and uncivilised treatment at the hands of the government.'⁷¹ Sanghvi criticised the jail's inadequate facilities given that 'for the last 100 years Akola District Prison has not accommodated any female political detainee'.⁷²

The Shah Commission referred to some of these women's experiences in its reports, noting Snehalata Reddy's treatment in its account of prison conditions in Karnataka.⁷³ Its assessment of detentions in Delhi cited Primila Lewis's case as evidence of authorities' 'scant regard' for the instructions of the Ministry of Home Affairs, which ordered reviews of her detention and even her release on certain terms; orders which Delhi authorities did not follow.⁷⁴ Its summary of Tihar Jail also referred to the two Rajmatas' testimonies.⁷⁵ However, women's arrests were generally not part of the Commission's remit and few

⁶⁹ LSS Leaflet, Mumbai (January 1976) Subject Files No. 315, JP Papers, NMML.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Letter from 'a Detenuue' to Indira Gandhi (14 January 1976) 'Disgraceful and Inhuman Treatment of Ms Mrinal Gore in Akola Jail', Subject File No 315, JP Papers, NMML.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ SCI, *Third and Final report*, 142.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 440

⁷⁵ SCI, *Interim Report II*, 39.

authorities admitted detaining female political prisoners.⁷⁶ Only three regions – the states of Karnataka, Kerala and the Union Territory of Mizoram – reported female prisoners to the Commission in the quantitative data submitted. Summarising arrests and detentions in Karnataka, the Commission claimed that ‘8 journalists, 4 teachers, 19 students, 19 trade union leaders and 3 women’ were among its 487 MISA detainees.⁷⁷ Authorities in Kerala recorded, ‘3 journalists, 45 school/university teachers, 34 Trade Union leaders, 29 public servants and 4 women’ within its 790 MISA detainees.⁷⁸ The 70 people arrested under MISA in Mizoram included people from political parties, banned organisations, economic offenders as well as ‘2 women and 14 public servants’.⁷⁹

The separation of these women into a separate gendered category belies further information about their detention. Depicted as simply ‘women’, the Commission does not reveal the reasons behind their arrests and they remain disconnected from other identities used to categorise prisoners: political party member, student, teacher, public servant etc. Singh’s brief assessment of women political prisoners in independent India, spanning just four pages, similarly removes their detention from the context of Emergency politics.⁸⁰ Although his discussion of women’s experiences uses Primila Lewis’s, Snehalata Reddy’s and Gayatri Devi’s prison diaries, Singh separates these from his analysis of Emergency detention, which draws primarily on the Shah Commission’s reports.⁸¹

A careful reading of these reports exposes the Commission’s figures on women prisoners as incomplete. Its brief references to Primila Lewis and Gayatri Devi undermine the statistics, demonstrating that Emergency authorities in Delhi also detained women. A small number of examples that the Commission used to illustrate detention conditions and

⁷⁶ As my discussion of the large numbers of women detained across Maharashtra shows, states’ failure to report women’s incarceration to the Commission cannot stand as evidence that those states detained no women during the Emergency.

⁷⁷ SCI, *Third and Final report*, 70.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁸⁰ Singh, *Political Prisoners in India*, 238-241.

⁸¹ Ibid., 241-250.

procedures in other states also show that the government detained women elsewhere,⁸² as does evidence about Emergency imprisonment in Maharashtra. According to the Commission, the state detained 5473 people under MISA and 9799 under DIR,⁸³ meaning that Maharashtra held 15.6% of the country's MISA and 12.9% of DIR detainees during the Emergency. 'Anti-socials and criminals constituted more than half of the total number of detainees under the MISA' in this state. Authorities arrested 1717 people because of their alleged connections with banned organisations and 780 more for their affiliation with political parties. Among these individuals, Jana Sangh associates accounted for the highest number (503), followed by people connected to the Socialist Party (207).⁸⁴

The LSS's review of a *satyagraha* campaign in Mumbai recorded that several female leaders, including Jana Sangh Councillor Jayawantiben Mehta, CPI (M) leader Ahilya Rangnekar and Socialist Kamal Desai, led groups of protesters and were arrested under MISA. A subsection of this report titled 'women double march to jail' asserted that 'lady *satyagrahis* have given a great fillip and aura to this movement'. *Smt* Shailaja Guka, 'a newlywed woman belonging to the backward classes' offered *satyagraha* on 8 December in a Mumbai locality with fifteen other women.⁸⁵ Other reports highlighted the imprisonment of prominent female public figures in the state. September 1976's bulletin recorded that 'Durga Bhagwat, a renowned critic in Marathi literature and President of the Marathi literary conference, Karad, detained under MISA on 19 September 1976. Mrinal Gore, MLA, is transferred to Bombay Central Jail and the order is served to transfer her to Dhulia District

⁸² In its report on Bihar, the Commission criticised authorities' refusal to grant parole even in cases that warranted it, and cited the example of *Smt* Mohini Jha in support of its discussion. Prison authorities refused to grant her parole when her husband was sick in January 1976 and again later in the year even when doctors recommended parole on medical grounds because she fell ill. The Commission notes that she received medical treatment in the prison instead (SCI, *Third and Final Report* 60). One of the Commission's key findings was that authorities across the country utilised the amended MISA inappropriately to detain and hold without trial offenders who should have been arrested and tried under the Criminal Code. The report cited one example from Madhya Pradesh, where police detained three women under MISA before convicting and fining them for illicit distillation (86).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ LSS, Mumbai Review of Satyagraha.

Jail.⁸⁶ These references are extremely brief and provide no indication about the scale on which Maharashtra authorities detained women as part of its crackdown on dissent.

Documentation on the Emergency collected by Dr Arun Limaye gives some insights into this scale. Along with letters sent between female detainees, the Limaye Papers contain data about the number of women imprisoned in several jails across Maharashtra.

Prison	DIR	MISA
Amravati Central	18	
Bhir District		1
Akola District		2
Solapur District	10	
Jalgaon District	5	
Satara District	3	
Dhule District		3
Yerwada Central	89	54
Nagpur Central	145	18
Aurangabad Central	60	10
Sangli District	23	
Bombay Central	59	11
Chandrapur District	26	
Wardha District	26	

Table 6.2: Women detained under MISA and DIR in Maharashtra Central and District Jails

Transfers meant that many women were often detained in multiple state prisons and so their names appear several times in the records of different jails. In total, the state government arrested 449 women under DIR. Their various ages give some indication of their diversity. The women detained at Yerwada Central Prison (YCP) under this legislation, for instance, were aged between 17 and 59. Although some of the records indicate under which section the government made arrests, they do not give specific details about the reasons behind them. However, the majority of women's arrests in the state under DIR fell within a ten-week period of LSS-organised *satyagraha* launched on Nehru *Jayanti* in November 1975, suggesting their active participation in protest and courting arrest as part of this opposition initiative.⁸⁷ Yerwada admitted all eighty-nine of its DIR detainees between 25 November 1975 and 15 January 1976 and at Bombay Central, all but two women were

⁸⁶ LSS, *Satya Samachar*, 7-8 (26 September 1976) in Basu, *Underground Literature*, 51.

⁸⁷ LSS, Mumbai Review of Satyagraha.

detained between 15 November 1975 and 27 January 1976. Authorities admitted thirty-one women to Nagpur Central Prison (NCP) on the day the LSS launched this programme, along with a further 100 between 20 November and 3 December 1975. Solapur, Jalgaon, Amravati and Chandrapur District Jails all listed the women they detained under the Emergency as '*satyagrahis*'. Solapur District Prison logged nine of these, aged between 30 and 60, all of whom it admitted between 8 December 1975 and 1 January 1976. Sangli District Prison received all but one of its twenty-three detainees in two groups, on 20 December 1975 and 8 January 1976. Women arrested outside of this well publicised period of organised protest were still often detained in groups on the same day. For instance, NCP admitted the remaining fourteen women detained under DIR together on 17 July 1976, suggesting their participation in some form of collaborative oppositional activity.

Government arrested, convicted and released some of these DIR prisoners in relatively short spaces of time. Wardha District Prison admitted ten women on 23 November 1975 and records show that authorities convicted and released them all on 6 December 1975. The detainees detained at Nagpur on 14 November were convicted with their 'date of disposal' listed as 22 December 1975. Authorities detained a smaller number of sixty-five women in total under MISA. Several of these detainees spent time at different prisons in the state, but YCP held the largest community of political prisoners under MISA for the greatest duration. 51-year-old CPI (M) leader Ahilya Rangnekar and 47-year-old Socialist Party leader Pramila Dandavate were both arrested a few days into the Emergency and admitted to YCP on 3 August 1975. They mostly remained there until their release on 21 January 1977.⁸⁸ Jayawantiben Mehta, aged 36, was similarly detained on 3 August 1975 and released on 18 January 1977. Socialists Mangala Parikh, whose husband G.G. Parikh also spent time at Yerwada, and Kamal Desai were both admitted to YCP on 24 October 1975. They remained there until authorities transferred them to Dhule District Prison on 23

⁸⁸ Pramila was housed primarily at Yerwada but transferred to Bombay Central Prison on two occasions for a few days in January and March 1976. References to healthcare and treatment for a condition on her leg within her correspondence suggest this transfer was for medical reasons.

September 1976. After a successful court petition, the state government transferred Mrinal Gore from Akola District Prison to Yerwada, where she spent several months from April 1976 before also being transferred to Dhule. Marathi writer Durga Bhagwat, who was admitted to Bombay Central Prison (BCP) in September 1976 and spent most of her detention there, also spent a few days at YCP in order to appear in court in November 1976.⁸⁹

Built by colonial authorities in 1871, YCP has a long history as a politicised space. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and many other freedom fighters spent time there in 1932 and again in 1942 during the Quit India movement.⁹⁰ In 1975, its capacity to hold female prisoners was unique, as one of a small number of jails with separate facilities for up to 126 women prisoners.⁹¹ It held 104 in 1975 and 125 in 1976, not exceeding the space's capacity,⁹² so although the rest of the prison suffered from the Emergency's characteristic overcrowding the women's ward did not.⁹³ In an interview with *Femina*, Mrinal Gore contrasted this with her experience at Akola: 'At Yerwada prison on the other hand, there were special arrangements for detainees.'⁹⁴ Yerwada is an important space for this chapter's analysis given the large and steady community of women detained there. Its exact size is difficult to quantify because of the frequent transfers and sudden influxes. *Femina* claimed that authorities detained thirty-five women there as political prisoners and the prison's records are generally consistent with this as an average (see appendix 1).⁹⁵ Although the magazine framed these women's narratives as tales of 'police brutality, sadism and humiliation', it insisted that their stories were also 'a saga of courage, faith and endurance', with the women 'firm in their political beliefs'.⁹⁶ The presence of this community

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ 'Freedom Fighters to hold August meet in Yerwada Jail' *Times of India* (4 July 2002) <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/Freedom-fighters-to-hold-August-meet-Yerwada-jail/articleshow/14990928.cms?referral=PM> (accessed 15 May 2017).

⁹¹ Neera K. Soni, *Women behind Bars* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT Ltd, 1989) 1.

⁹² Ibid. 3.

⁹³ Yerwada formally had the capacity to accommodate 2179 prisoners, although the number peaked at 4157 during the Emergency (SCI, *Third and Final Report*, 144).

⁹⁴ 'Women Prisoners Tell All' *Femina*, 18.8 (22 April 1977) 19.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

of female detainees at Yerwada and their narratives, captured through letters in Limaye's collection, allows us to explore this endurance and consider the second category of women's jail experiences that Thapar-Björkert identifies: 'the prison as a site of female community and resistance'.

6.3 '*Here in the jail it is a lot of fun*': Women's narratives of imprisonment in Maharashtra

Patwardhan's film focused exclusively on the violent, gendered threats that Vasanthi Raman experienced after her arrest. In an interview conducted at the Centre for Women's Development Studies in Delhi in October 2014, Vasanthi told me more about her participation in resistance activities and her detention at YCP in November 1976. Vasanthi constructed a far more positive narrative of her incarceration at Yerwada, emphasising that it was 'quite unlike other north Indian states where people were not treated very well'.⁹⁷ Explaining this comparatively better treatment, she foregrounded its physical and spatial environment: 'Yerwada is an old prison and was a little more open; we were not even locked in. There is a huge barrack, and only the outer gates would be closed, so you could walk out at night and take a stroll in the yard or something.'⁹⁸ She juxtaposed this with her solitary confinement in the Mumbai lock up which Patwardhan's documentary focused on. The relative freedom engendered by YCP's environment was notorious among Emergency detainees. Socialist Party leader and Pramila's husband Madhu Dandavate, who was mostly detained at Bangalore Central Prison in Karnataka for the regime's duration, spent some time in Yerwada. In a December 1976 letter to Durga Bhagwat, he asserted, 'if one must spend a lot of time in jail, then there is no place like Yerwada. It is a really nice place, I love

⁹⁷ This treatment is consistent with some of the Shah Commission of Inquiry's general findings. Its state-wide report concluded that generally, authorities gave political prisoners A class status. They usually separated them from convict prisoners and did not subject them to solitary confinement or fetters. The Commission did cite instances of hunger strikes and conflict with jail authorities in some cases and stressed that 'because of overcrowding, sanitation had been adversely affected in most of the jails'. It also recorded that detainees were usually permitted outdoor games and had access to several other facilities such as hot water for bathing, newspapers and periodicals from the government's approved list and use of their own radios and fans (SCI, *Third and Final Report*, 144).

⁹⁸ Vasanthi Raman, Interview with Author (New Delhi: October 2014).

the trees here'.⁹⁹ Such comments elucidate Moran's observations about the importance of prison buildings and the design of carceral space in shaping the lived realities of the prison experience.¹⁰⁰

Positive narratives of imprisonment connected to Yerwada's physical environment proliferated across women's letters. In a joint one written on 7 August 1975, Pramila Dandavate and Mangala Parikh reflected positively on their detention because of the prison's 'tasty meals' and 'nice climate'.¹⁰¹ This climate was a frequent motif in Pramila's letters. Writing to her nephew in September 1976, she described the environment in detail: 'Here in the jail it is a lot of fun. Here there are big, big trees, many different birds come early in the morning and wake us up with their chirping... You know, on one tree, seven owls are sitting and making faces. It's really so funny.'¹⁰² Pramila grounded her depiction of fun in the prison in its physical characteristics, which appear more akin to natural and open rather than confined, restrictive surroundings. For women held in other prisons in Maharashtra who passed through Yerwada, the memory of this environment remained a positive force. Sumathi Sukalinkar was detained at YCP in November 1975, transferred to NCP in February 1976 and held there for the remainder of the Emergency. After almost two months in Nagpur, she wrote to Aruna Ramachandra Dhere, a student activist, fellow YCP detainee and now Marathi writer, that 'I cannot forget Yerwada Jail and its birds chirping', describing them as 'a big inspiration for me'.¹⁰³

Aruna's communications during her shorter stay at Yerwada under DIR convey similar perceptions of the prison space. In one letter she wrote:

Right now the climate is so beautiful. I can see the pink light of the morning, there is a cool breeze and it's very nice to have a cup of tea near the stove and then sit under the mango tree and absorb the gentle sun. In the evening it's so beautiful, the sea, the sky, the different colours during sunset. Here there are many different birds in the trees... The nature and atmosphere are so beautiful around this jail. You would not imagine that when we are sitting under the tree,

⁹⁹ Madhu Dandavate (MD) (Bangalore Central) to Durga Bhagwat (DB) (BCP), 13 December 1976, Limaye Papers, Reel 8, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

¹⁰⁰ Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 113-128.

¹⁰¹ Pramila Dandavate (PD) and Mangala Parikh (MP) (YCP) to Vimal, 7 August 1975, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁰² PD (YCP) to Ashish, 6 September 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁰³ Sumathi Sukalinkar (NCP) to Aruna Dhere (AD), 17 April 1976, LP, Reel 8.

the leaves fall around us like rain. They fall on your back, your shoulders, your head, your lap, everywhere, all you can see is leaves. It's so peaceful and quiet.¹⁰⁴

Such depictions are far removed from some of the most infamous narratives of detention under the Emergency. They emphasise idyllic and peaceful surroundings. The focus on nature in these communications emerges as a tool for resilience, as prisoners recast the prison as a site of relative freedom and mobility. This paradoxical sense of freedom reveals that the nature of the prison space at Yerwada and its meaning was not fixed for female political prisoners. Space is not 'a passive locus or container', defined by binaries such as inside and outside, detained and free. Rather, 'space and place are continually contested and negotiated and the processes involved therein may be nuancedly empowering'.¹⁰⁵ Carceral geographers frequently problematise the notion that spaces and places are stable or fixed, emphasising the possibility of mobility within and between penal institutions¹⁰⁶ and the presence of penal disciplinary mechanisms beyond prison walls.¹⁰⁷ Women's depictions of Yerwada during the Emergency similarly problematise any conception of a stable, monolithic prison space by foregrounding the potential for mobility and a sense of freedom over physical restriction.

In doing so, women also refused to position themselves entirely as victims of the Emergency regime in their letters. Aruna's references to the sea, sky and sunset reject this sense of confinement, as does her reflection that 'from here you can see airplanes going over head. Sometimes you can even see the windows, they are so close.'¹⁰⁸ This suggests a connection to the world outside; a contested sense of confinement which reveals an element of fluidity in the prison boundaries. References to star gazing have the same effect. Pramila Dandavate ended one letter in May 1976 with the statement: 'I'm busy watching

¹⁰⁴ AD (YCP) to Milind, 31 January 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁰⁵ Raju, 'Conceptualising Gender, Space and Place', 14.

¹⁰⁶ Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 71-86.

¹⁰⁷ For instance, Dominique Moran, Laura Piacentini and Judith Pallot, 'Liminal TransCarceral Space: Prison Transportation for Women in the Russian Federation' in Moran, Gill and Conlon, *Carceral Spaces*.

¹⁰⁸ AD (YCP) to Milind, 31 January 1976, LP, Reel 8.

stars in the sky'.¹⁰⁹ Mrinal Gore recorded that 'observing stars, exercise and playing games, that was what was going on today. Today in the morning at 4.30am I and Pramila got up to come together and watch the stars.'¹¹⁰

Whereas in earlier histories of space and place, 'an already made geography sets the stage', the spatial turn in contemporary theorising sees social and spatial structures as mutually constitutive.¹¹¹ As Edward Soja argues, 'space itself may be primordially given, but the organisation and meaning of space is a product of social transition, transformation and experience'.¹¹² A location's physical and environmental characteristics influence social life, but social interactions also shape those locations. Women's relatively positive experiences of detention under the Emergency in Maharashtra were influenced by Yerwada's architecture and environment. However, women also exerted agency over this space and contributed to its positive constructions through the communities, social relations and routines that they formed. Theoretical insights into the social construction of space are useful for understanding multiple and sometimes contradictory interpretations of Emergency prison spaces. Drawing on such insights, geographers have established that 'space is contested, fluid and uncertain' and the array of socio-spatial practices that define them 'result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries'.¹¹³ Prisons in Maharashtra during the Emergency can hold numerous meanings simultaneously, embodying both the institutional power of the Emergency state and women detainees' sense of freedom, social communities and politics of resistance.

Yerwada and BCP were intensely social spaces and women's ability to forge communities was critical to their survival and resistance. In protests against Mrinal Gore's detention at Akola, the prison's inadequate physical space was paramount. However, the High Court judgment that ordered her transfer primarily criticised the absence of a social

¹⁰⁹ PD (YCP) to Dilip, 14 May 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹¹⁰ Mrinal Gore (MG) (YCP) to Anandi Vahini, 18 May 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹¹¹ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 14.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 79-80.

¹¹³ McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place*, 4.

space, stating that 'without the company of a woman political detainee or even other political detainees', authorities 'cannot but be held to be operating as punishment', rather than preventive detention. The order, passed on 26 March 1976, demanded that she be detained 'with the benefit of the company of other women detainees' and other facilities in accordance with MISA rules. Authorities duly transferred her to YCP.¹¹⁴ Mrinal expressed her hopes for a transfer to Yerwada prior to this ruling on these very grounds in letter to Pramila Dandavate before her case was decided: 'going to Yerwada is hopeless. Pune High Court sessions are still going on. From yesterday repairs have been going on in jail so there is no chance of shifting. I was hoping to come there.'¹¹⁵ Pramila's concerns for Mrinal's lack of routine at Akola also underscore the perceived importance of company. In one letter, she urged Mrinal to 'tell me your daily routine. You may feel it's very different from the hectic schedule of Mumbai to such a steady and peaceful place like Akola. Now it may feel quiet there. No ringing of phones, no speeches, no meetings. What do you do other than reading?'¹¹⁶

Her Socialist Party colleagues demonstrated similar concerns when authorities transferred Mrinal from Yerwada to Dhule District Prison in September 1976. In a letter to Durga Bhagwat, Madhu Dandavate described how 'I tried very hard to go with Mrinali to Dhule. I had come forward but the government stopped us. Kamal Desai and Mangala Parikh went. That Mrinali is not alone is a source of happiness.'¹¹⁷ He expressed similar concerns about Durga's detention conditions at BCP, asking 'are you there alone, without your books, or are there other women inmates with you?'¹¹⁸ Other women at Yerwada wrote frequently to Durga with the same emphasis on companionship. In early January 1977, Usha Thombare asked, 'you have a court date on 28th, that means you will come here by

¹¹⁴ 'Gist of High Court Judgement in *Smt* Mrinal Gore's Case about Jail Conditions', Subject File No 315, JP Papers, NMML.

¹¹⁵ MG (BCP) to PD (YCP), 30 January 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹¹⁶ PD (YCP) to MG (Akola), 31 December 1975, LP, Reel 8.

¹¹⁷ MD (Bangalore Central) to DB (BCP), 13 December 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

26th or 27th, right? We are all waiting for you.’¹¹⁹ Transfers to facilitate court appearances, medical treatment and family proximity occurred regularly. These changes in physical environment, however brief, were significant not just because they meant a change of location, but because they meant a change of social space. Authorities frequently transferred Jayawantiben Mehta between Yerwada and Bombay Central. She described one of her stays at YCP in a letter to Durga Bhagwat: ‘finally I reached here at eight in the night. Whole day everyone was waiting for me and preparing for me, running all round. They didn’t realise when I reached. My table was decorated with a flowerpot and with flowers it was written “welcome” on it. Everyone was happy.’ She also recorded how ‘the number of people was increasing; we didn’t even realise how the time left while chit-chatting with each other’.¹²⁰ One of a group of ten women arrested under DIR during the organised *satyagraha* described a similarly warm welcome: ‘we reached here at 6pm. But all the ladies came to welcome us. All of them started hugging me.’¹²¹ When Durga spent time in Yerwada later in the same month to attend court, she wrote to Madhu Dandavate that ‘it was an accidental visit. But I could meet Pramila. We did a lot of chit-chatting. I was very happy after meeting all the women. The whole trip became kind of fun for me.’¹²²

Vasanthi Raman’s recollections of her detention emphasised the strong bonds formed between Yerwada women. She told me, ‘that experience was a bonding one, it bonded those who went through it. I remember a lot of the women who were older than me, two of them have passed away now, they used to take me to the hospital, bring me back and things like that – I was very ill at that time with a bad attack of laryngitis.’¹²³ An emphasis on such intense bonds and carefully constructed social routines proliferated across women’s letters. A group detained under DIR at BCP in December 1975 wrote to Pramila

¹¹⁹ Usha Thombare (UT) (YCP) to DB (BCP), 14 January 1977, LP, Reel 8.

¹²⁰ Jayawantiben Mehta (YCP) to DB (BCP), 14 November 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹²¹ Letter from an undisclosed recipient, signed ‘S’, dated 27 December 1975, LP, Reel 8. Although the collection does not contain the name of the author, it is dated 29 December and she writes that ‘day before yesterday we got caught’, indicating that this must be from one of ten women arrested on 25 December.

¹²² DB (YCP) to MD (Bangalore Central), 27 November 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹²³ Vasanthi Raman, Interview with Author.

Dandavate and her fellow detenues, addressing them as '*Mausi* (aunty) and other *Maushis* (aunties)'.¹²⁴ They happily reported that 'we all are many here' and 'have become very friendly to the people here. We chat for hours as conversation is the greatest pleasure.'¹²⁵

An undated letter from a Yerwada detainee similarly reported:

Pramila Dandavate has become "Pammi aunty" for everyone. When I entered here she hugged me saying she wanted to meet me. Ahilya Rangnekar became "Ahilya aunty" and the most beloved. The person who used to give me her sarees Jayawantiben Mehta, "Jaya Aunty". I received more love than I have ever received before. In short, I am fine here.¹²⁶

Women's letters persistently emphasise the intensity of the bonds formed within the prison spaces in Yerwada and in other jails in the state. In a letter from Akola District Prison, Mrinal Gore reflected on the initial days after her arrest spent in BCP, noting that 'there were many *satyagrahis*, when they left they actually cried. We were all there together very nicely.'¹²⁷

Women's narratives reveal the kinds of activities that constructed their daily lives and confinement in the Yerwada community. *Femina* illuminated some of these in its special feature on women detained during the Emergency, and foregrounded them in its construction of narratives that emphasised agency and empowerment. Its report on and interview with Ahilya Rangnekar stated:

With all the intentions of settling down for a long stay in jail the women detainees apparently started out to make life as cozy as any women's club. 'Do you see this bag?' she asked, pointing almost affectionately to her large black wire knitted purse. 'I made it myself in jail' she informed me proudly. 'We did a lot of this kind of thing – arts and crafts. Luckily we were all of the same type, all interested in literature, drama and art. So we held cultural programmes.'¹²⁸

In a letter to her brother written at the end of January 1976, Aruna Dhere similarly described how 'on 26th January we held a programme here, recited some beautiful songs and they

¹²⁴ The letter is signed 'Mangal, Vijaya, Yamutai and others'. The data furnished by state authorities to Dr Limaye shows that Vijaya Anant, Mangala Ramachandra and Yamunabai Prabhakar were among a group of 19 women arrested under DIR and admitted to BCP between 15 and 26 November 1975. Mangal, Vijaya, Yamutai and others (BCP) to PD (YCP), 26 December 1975, LP, Reel 8.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ This is part of a letter included in Limaye's microfilmed collection, undated from an undisclosed recipient. From the context and references to other detainees, it appears that this is from a woman detained at Yerwada. The letter also states that 'Rukmini, Prabhu, Vijaya, Sohni, other people are here'. These correspond to a number of forenames and surnames in a large list of women detained at Yerwada under DIR in December 1975. See Appendix 1.

¹²⁷ MG (Akola), 27 December 1975, LP, Reel 8.

¹²⁸ 'Women Prisoners tell All', 19.

were really nice...You would not believe it but we had a lot of fun. We danced, sang, acted, everything.¹²⁹

Apart from these organised programmes, conversation, reading and each other's company filled female detainees' days. One prisoner wrote to Durga Bhagwat that 'here time just passes with talking, laughing and chit chatting'.¹³⁰ A DIR detainee similarly recorded, 'now it has been two days here. We had a good daily routine here and get free time also. In that time we read or gossip or write letters. We all play also and we enjoy each other's company.' She reiterated that 'because of the company of other women we are having a nice time here. Sometimes I feel that these days shouldn't get over.'¹³¹ Shanti Naik, who later became a formal Janata Party member and MLA, depicted an array of activities in a December 1976 letter, revealing that 'Pramila made the chutney', she was letter writing and 'Indumati [Kelkar, Socialist] is busy making dolls'.¹³² Pramila claimed 'we are even busy, knitting, weaving and with women's household jobs'.¹³³ Reporting her happiness at Yerwada to Madhu Dandavate, Mrinal Gore emphasised that 'after so many years I got free time now. So trying to make use of it. After so many years we are living together so chatting and chatting.'¹³⁴ She praised the Emergency for creating the conditions to form these social spaces: 'this is all because of Indira Madam. We came together and could spend so much time together, else how would we have come together.'¹³⁵

In correspondence with family, Pramila asserted, 'I have been in for seven months but I am still not bored here. Singing, reading, knitting, gossiping, are the ways in which I spend my time. There are more than 100 people here but everyone lives together very well.'¹³⁶ The volume of detainees and the vibrant community of women incarcerated at Yerwada influenced these positive narratives of incarceration. In March 1976, Pramila

¹²⁹ AD to Milind, 31 January 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹³⁰ Nimutai (YCP) to DB (BCP), 12 December 1976. LP, Reel 8.

¹³¹ 'S' (YCP), 27 December 1975, LP, Reel 8.

¹³² Shanti Naik (SN) (YCP), 8 December 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹³³ PD (YCP) to Shripad Tondvalkar (ST), 8 June 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹³⁴ MG (YCP) to MD, 19 April 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹³⁵ MG (YCP) to Anandi Vahini, 18 May 1976.

¹³⁶ PD (YCP) to Vrindavan and Asha (brother and sister-in-law), undated, LP, Reel 8.

commented on the fluctuating population of political prisoners: 'now jail is becoming empty though it used to be overcrowded. We are successful in making friendship with young girls. We are missing some of our old friends but new friends are taking their place.'¹³⁷ Decreasing numbers changed the nature of this space and Pramila exhibited the same kind of disappointment whenever the prison experienced such a fluctuation. She wrote to three fellow detenues in BCP in October 1976:

Here now, people have begun to move out. Hansa Rajda has to undergo surgery so she is on parole for three months. Mrinal, Chabutai [Kamal Desai] and Mangala are in Dhule. Jayawantiben is your neighbour only [in BCP]...Ahilya is also going to come to Mumbai for some treatment. So now there are 7-8 of us women left here. Everything is quiet now. How much noise can I alone make? Someone has to be there to respond, na!¹³⁸

She implored these women to 'keep writing to me guys. I'm alone here' and celebrated that soon professor and CPI (ML) activist 'Sunder Navalkar and Indumati Kelkar are going to accompany me.'¹³⁹

These social interactions and activities were an important strategy of resilience. Pramila wrote in July 1976 that 'days and nights are coming but we are still trying to pass the time in each other's company'.¹⁴⁰ Mrinal expressed angst when moved from Yerwada's physical and social space to Dhule District Prison later in the year. After authorities informed her of the transfer, she stated:

after 6-7 months of time along with other *satyagrahi* and friends I don't want to go to Dhule and stay alone...I think the government is very angry with me and that is why it's keeping me away from everyone and they are taking revenge on me now...Now, don't know for how many days I have to survive along only with these memories...So I think it is going to be difficult to be difficult for me to survive there.¹⁴¹

The jail's idyllic surroundings and the political prisoners' engagements with these were a steady constant in the midst of these transfers and fluctuations. In a letter to Aruna Dhere

¹³⁷ PD (YCP) to Shubhangi (BCP), 3 March 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹³⁸ PD (YCP) to Nandu, Sudhakar, Madhave, 9 October 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ PD (YCP) to ST, 9 July 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁴¹ Mrinal Gore (YCP) to Pushpatai, 21 August 1976, LP, Reel 8.

after her release in May 1976, Pramila Dandavate foregrounded the importance of Yerwada's environment as a substitute for the women's company:

You all left from here now it's become so quiet only the birds are chirping on the trees. To give us company many different birds of different kinds are there. We hear their different calls and we find a new bird daily...Do you remember in front of your barrack there was one Shirish tree? I still sit under it and observe its beauty for hours. Nowadays, I and Mrinaltai sit together and observe the sky to identify the constellations and you know, we found Scorpio and many others. Nowadays, I read books and observe stars.¹⁴²

In another letter written towards the end of her detention, Pramila wrote that 'here trees and birds are too good, because of it our stay became bearable'.¹⁴³

Shanti Naik foregrounded the same strategies for coping with detention and fluctuating prison communities in a letter to Socialist leader Madhu Limaye written in April 1976:

Tomorrow Mumbai *satyagraha* division is also going. Then we will be only sixteen women. Now we are adjusting ourselves here and trying to pass our time in nature. Mrinal is crazy about stars. Every night she is busy looking for a new one and showing us.¹⁴⁴

Yerwada's physical surroundings were critical in maintaining women's spirits in the absence of large groups of fellow prisoners for company. The specific dynamics of these jails encouraged women to forge relationships and support networks. It is important to note that most of the women discussed in this chapter, and those that feature in Limaye's collection of letters, belong to similar social and political groups. Many had links with or were part of left wing organisations, especially the Socialist Party, as his own connections no doubt shaped the collection of materials. Several of them were leaders of these organisations: well educated, urban, Hindu women in relatively privileged positions in terms of class and caste. Although these similarities no doubt encouraged a sense of camaraderie, the letters demonstrate that this was also determined by the daily experiences, physicalities and social routines of prison life as well as a collective anti-Emergency politics that was present within these prison spaces.

¹⁴² PD (YCP) to AD, 1 May 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁴³ PD (YCP) to Janhavi, 27 December 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁴⁴ SN (YCP) to Madhu Limaye (ML), 27 April 1976, LP, Reel 8.

6.4 'This jail experience is very precious to me. I will be a changed lady hereafter': Politicised prison spaces

Positive narratives foregrounding a sense of freedom and community are integrally connected to these women's anti-Emergency politics. In her study of Naxalite women's experiences of incarceration, Atreyee Sen identifies resistance not in radical acts but in cultures of community and the ways that female prisoners 'enacted every day happiness' in the face of incarceration.¹⁴⁵ She argues that through activities like 'playing loud and enjoyable music with pots and pans, through laughter and refusal to display sadness, and by entertaining children with puppet shows', groups of female political prisoners refused to bow to authorities' attempts to 'break their spirit'. In these performances, Sen identifies strategies for survival and 'an affective and resilient political aesthetic, which in turn contested repressive cultures of captivity'¹⁴⁶ and 'powerfully feminized a contested patriarchal space'.¹⁴⁷ Female detainees' refusal to submit to confinement, their reconstruction of the prison as a space of relative freedom and their formation of communities and networks of solidarity are integrally connected to the anti-Emergency activities for which they were arrested.

Women also engaged in explicit acts of defiance during their detention. Even in Yerwada, where access to facilities was relatively good, they did not passively inhabit the prison but shaped its environment and governance through protest. Pramila wrote:

After coming here we followed up for many improvements. Even in this age of independence there were old style toilets from which the waste had to be carried out on the heads of people. It was hell! So we have to change it. To change so many things was not an easy job, but we all struggle a lot to make it happen.¹⁴⁸

Ahilya Rangnekar similarly told *Femina*, 'we had to fight for every single facility they gave us. For the first two months they had even stopped our meeting friends and relatives.

¹⁴⁵ Atreyee Sen, 'Slaps, Beatings, Laughter, *Adda*, Puppet Shows: Naxal Women Prisoners in Calcutta and the Art of Happiness in Captivity' in Raminder Kaur and Parul Dave Mukherji (eds.) *Arts and Aesthetics in a Globalizing World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 121.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 125.

¹⁴⁸ PD (YCP) to Janhavi, 27 December 1976, LP, Reel 8.

Ultimately, through a court order we obtained what had been our right in the first place. Even things like building a proper path to the toilets which were far from our rooms had to be fought for.¹⁴⁹

Access, or lack of access, to physical facilities was an important component of Emergency detainees' prison experiences. Family visits were part of the facilities guaranteed to political, especially higher class, MISA detainees. Women prisoners in Maharashtra celebrated their access to this facility. Kamal Desai wrote from Dhule District Prison to Pramila Dandavate, describing one such visit from her family: 'twenty men and twenty women were present from my family...we were together for more than two and a half hours so I was able to talk to everyone freely. We all laughed a lot.'¹⁵⁰ Women also protested fervently when these facilities were not available to them. In their joint letter dated 7 August 1975 from YCP, Pramila and Mangala Parikh recorded, 'on the 9th we are going on strike and keeping a one day fast to protest a new rule which includes a ban on meeting one's relatives in jail'.¹⁵¹

Requests for temporary parole from prison were also areas of intense contestation. Pramila's letters reference an application but suggest that authorities did not grant it. In May 1976, she wrote that she applied 'for fifteen day parole in order to go to Delhi on 1 April' and was yet to receive a response.¹⁵² Writing again to her brother and sister-in-law later in the same month, she underscored that 'parole is not available so easily, you need to have strong reasons for it. I have applied for it to go to Delhi but still don't know if it will be sanctioned. I've very few hopes for it.'¹⁵³ A few months later, Pramila's plans for parole changed in response to the Socialist Party and underground movement's rejection of it as part of their stand against the Emergency regime. She wrote, 'everything else is fine, but no chances of getting out. Nana [Socialist Party MP N.G. Goray] is not in favour of parole.'¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ 'Women Prisoners Tell All', 19.

¹⁵⁰ Kamal Desai (Dhule) to PD (YCP), undated, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁵¹ PD and MP (YCP) to Vimal, 7 August 1975.

¹⁵² PD (YCP) to Vrindavan, 14 May 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁵³ PD (YCP) to Vrindavan and Asha, 23 May 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁵⁴ PD (YCP) to Asha, 30 July 1976, LP, Reel 8

Uma Chakravarti told me that the rejection of parole and offers of release were a strategy of resistance that incarcerated women readily adopted. She revealed, 'I heard from the women that I talked to, the Naxalite women who were in jail during the Emergency, that that was something they didn't want to do because that would mean turning their backs on the revolutionary ideas. They never signed those things.'¹⁵⁵ *Femina* similarly reported Ahilya's comments that "the Chief Minister asked us [women in Yerwada] to give an undertaking that we would not take part in any activities prejudicial to the Emergency if we were released. None of us agreed" she said, with obvious relish.' In its depiction of this refusal, *Femina* emphasised the collective agency of Yerwada's community of female detainees: 'Her stubborn determination to live up to her principles was evidently matched by her companions in jail.'¹⁵⁶

Vasanthi Raman described how YCP's community cut across political affiliations: 'we were all put together. I was in Yerwada...and there were many other political prisoners at that time from the CPI (M), the Socialists and even the Jana Sangh. One woman was there from that party. Overall, I think we were about eighteen or twenty people, all together in one barrack.' Finding herself confined with women from across the political spectrum was, for Vasanthi, one of the most noteworthy and revolutionary aspects of her Emergency incarceration. She reflected, 'the extreme left and the extreme right were together in prison, often in the same cell or barracks. That was an interesting experience because we then learnt a dialogue and we were in a common fight against the regime.'¹⁵⁷ This situates the prison space as a site of active political engagement for the women detained there and underscores the connections between the prison and the wider underground resistance movement. Such unity between parties and people of disparate ideological affiliations was critical here and in the formation of the Janata Party. As noted, these political relationships were also invested with a deep sense of sisterhood and friendship within Yerwada. Vasanthi

¹⁵⁵ Uma Chakravarti, Interview with Author.

¹⁵⁶ 'Women prisoners tell all', 19.

¹⁵⁷ Vasanthi Raman, Interview with Author.

emphasised, 'people with whom you wouldn't otherwise politically have much to do with, they all became very good friends...Those who went through that period having shared prison life for whatever length of time were bonded because all across the political spectrum, everybody was put in prison.'¹⁵⁸ Pramila Dandavate regularly reflected on both the specific friendships that anchored her experience of detention and a broad sense of camaraderie and unity precipitated by the regime, noting that 'one more benefit of the Emergency is that it creates an atmosphere like pre-independent India and it also helps bring together people like us. If we sink, we do it together. If we survive, we do it together.'¹⁵⁹

This was also a place of radicalisation for women, often facilitated by the interactions that took place within the prison walls between detainees and convict prisoners, between political leaders and *satyagrahis*. Authorities detained Sumati Angre at BCP after she participated in LSS protests. In one letter, she professed that 'I never imagined that I will be imprisoned because of *satyagraha*. I was unaware of anything else in the world except household work and *apna bazar* (our market).' Sumati's participation in these protests and her detention were moments of politicisation and radicalisation, expanding her horizons beyond domestic concerns. She nurtured strong views about women's political participation, asking 'why is it that only men have to speak up against injustice? Even us women should take some of the responsibility. I thought of this and jumped into this *satyagraha* movement.' Sumati's imprisonment and particularly her interactions with other women cemented her immersion in the movement:

Here there are so many women who came together leaving their caste and creed. They all live together as Indians. Now Mrinaltai is also with us. How would I have got her company? I learn so many new things from her...you know, this jail experience is very precious to me. I will be a changed lady thereafter.¹⁶⁰

Sumati's confinement was a transformative experience, facilitating social and political interactions that would not occur in other environments. This excitement about interactions with political leadership within prison spaces occurred regularly. One Yerwada detainee

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ PD (YCP) to Janhavi, 27 December 1976.

¹⁶⁰ Sumati Angre (BCP), 6 March 1976, LP, Reel 8.

wrote to a family member that 'I heard the news that in Kolhapur Durga Bhagwat is caught. I was thinking she might come here and we will be lucky enough to get her company. But later on they came to know that she is in Mumbai. We are not lucky enough to get her company.'¹⁶¹ 26-year-old Usha Manjire, admitted to Yerwada on 31 December under DIR, also reflected 'I got abundant experience inside jail. My confidence boosted up like anything, this is the achievement of *satyagraha*.'¹⁶²

Ujjwal Kumar Singh locates women detainees' political consciousness in instances where they struggled for the basic rights of convict prisoners. The prison, he argues, 'reproduced the power relations and inequalities within society', and a political prisoner could either 'intervene on behalf of her "ordinary" sisters...or become an instrument of domination'.¹⁶³ Published accounts of women's Emergency detention abound in examples of the former. Chaudhuri reported that in Presidency Jail, 'Naxalite prisoners often protest against the stealing of prisoners' food and medicines in the hospital'.¹⁶⁴ Snehalata Reddy's diary is replete with such interventions. Her entry for 19 June 1976 reflected, 'at least I have achieved something here. I have stopped the horrible beatings the women prisoners used to get.' After a hunger strike, 'the food has slightly improved for them' and 'I have encouraged them to play – so the afternoons they are free to play quite a lot.'¹⁶⁵ Primila Lewis described smuggling literacy manuals into the prison and attempting to organise the prisoners against Mrs Singh, the officer in charge of the female ward at Ambala, which she saw as 'a continuation of the struggle we had waged outside'.¹⁶⁶ The Rajmatas, who held privileged positions even during incarceration, mobilised to improve conditions for convict prisoners, especially their children. Tihar authorities did not allow Gayatri Devi visitors for the first month of her detention. When she finally met with her daughter, she 'bombarded her with a long and elaborate list of things' to bring on her next visit: 'It was a list of children's

¹⁶¹ Ubadi (YCP) to Anna, 3 August 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁶² Usha Manjire (UM) (YCP), undated letter, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁶³ Singh, *Political Prisoners*, 240-241.

¹⁶⁴ Chaudhuri, 'Women Prisoners in Presidency Jail', 755.

¹⁶⁵ Reddy, *A Prison Diary*, 19.

¹⁶⁶ Lewis, *Reason Wounded*, 164.

clothes of sizes varying from infants to ten years old, and shawls, bottles of cough syrup, vitamins and boiled sweets. For while the women prisoners were supplied with clothes under prison regulations, the children they had of necessity bought with them did not qualify for the prison's permissible handouts.¹⁶⁷ In one of her letters, Pramila Dandavate requested that along with a money order and some sambar masala, a relative send her 'useful things for a lady who has just delivered'.¹⁶⁸

A BCP detainee foregrounded the transformative nature of such experiences, asserting, 'whatever knowledge I have got here in jail I don't think it possible to get even in a college or university. Here we can see different types of people, their different natures, their cooperation. You can get to hear different thoughts of people which will help you throughout life.'¹⁶⁹ For this reason, she relished her time spent within the prison walls: 'The moment I kept on thinking "how will I spend thirty days within these four walls." But here I realised that every day is different. Now I think that even if I had to spend one year here I would be ready. I wouldn't mind that. I am prepared for that.'¹⁷⁰

For many of the women detained in Yerwada and across Maharashtra, their detention was quite literally an educational experience, since reading and discussion constituted a critical part of their routines. This was a common feature of political imprisonment. In one of his letters to Durga Bhagwat, Madhu Dandavate wrote that at Bangalore Central Prison, 'recently we read the English translation of your speech, which you delivered in Marathi at Marathi Mumbai Library...People who are residing here really liked your speech.'¹⁷¹ Durga was a prominent anti-Emergency figure and women incarcerated at Yerwada also read her work. In a letter to the writer, Ahilya Rangnekar described how her daughter copied samples of Durga's books and other detainees discussed and read it after requesting a copy in the prison.¹⁷² Fellow MISA prisoner Usha

¹⁶⁷ Devi, *A Princess Remembers*, 246-247.

¹⁶⁸ PD (YCP) to Vrindavan, 14 May 1976.

¹⁶⁹ Tarabai Parbhakar (BCP) to Sadhana Tai, 27 December 1975, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ MD (Bangalore Central) to DB (BCP), 13 December 1975.

¹⁷² Ahilya Rangnekar (YCP) to DB (BCP), 13 January 1977, LP, Reel 8.

Thombare also informed Durga, 'I have taken lots of samples from your book here and actually I really liked them.'¹⁷³ Durga's own detention in BCP was also a time of reflection and reading related to her political stance on the Emergency. In October 1976, she wrote to Madhu Dandavate, 'I have written some 1500 words since I came here' and revealed, 'today I have decided to read up on democracy. I haven't got much time to write other things.'¹⁷⁴ Pramila Dandavate pointed to the importance of reading as a Yerwada activity and its connections to anti-Emergency political sentiments. In December 1976, she reflected that the '*Seva Dal* did a good job gifting us books. Each one of us here reads them, I didn't even mind if they were torn.' She named several books that the detainees 'read individually and together'.¹⁷⁵ Pramila also revealed, 'we are waiting for the weekly *Sadhana*...there is reading and also it is there that we get the confidence to speak, to express, to mould ourselves.'¹⁷⁶ This socialist weekly published in Marathi circulated anti-Emergency material and attempted to defy censorship. Detenues at BCP also reported that along with chatting for hours, they passed their time reading: 'got many books from *Seva Dal* office.'¹⁷⁷

Yerwada was also a site of intense discussion. Vasanthi told me, 'it was good company, good company in the sense that we had discussions. It was a highly intense political period in the life of the country and we were very much a part of it.' Ahilya Rangnekar also emphasised the educational and highly political nature of their social interactions: 'we also had a lot of discussions on various topics like the report on the status of women, politics or any other interesting subject'. She also described reading as another

¹⁷³ UT (YCP) to DB (BCP), 14 January 1977, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁷⁴ DB (BCP) to MD (Bangalore Central), 26 October 1976.

¹⁷⁵ Pramila refers to the *Rashtra Seva Dal*, a social organisation based in Pune, founded in 1941 and connected to many Socialist leaders. Her letters reveal that they were involved in arranging books and other provisions for detainees in Maharashtra. Pramila also wrote to Durga Bhagwat, 'you have sent your book along with the *Seva Dal* people. A big big thank you for that' (15 December 1976, LP, Reel 8).

¹⁷⁶ PD to Janhavi, 27 December 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁷⁷ Mangal, Vijaya, Yamutai and others (BCP) to PD (YCP), 26 December 1975.

of the women's favourite pastimes as they were allowed to read most books except prescribed ones, and had access to many (albeit censored) newspapers.

This permeation of anti-Emergency politics within the prison was also evident in Vasanthi's depiction of specific instances of resistance. She described how 'there was one day that Jayaprakash Narayan asked everybody in prison to go on a day's fast as a protest, and I think everyone must have done it, I did it.'¹⁷⁸ As well fighting vociferously for their own facilities, detainees also remained connected to the broader climate of resistance. Women wrote to their families, to other members or leaders of their political parties and to each other. These letters frequently commented on the wider political situation and especially the resistance movement. The politically charged nature of these interactions is evident in suggestions that jail authorities monitored their communications. Although the documents do not exhibit explicit evidence of censorship (for instance, in the form of blanked out sections of prose), women often discussed restrictions. In October 1976, Pramila Dandavate wrote from YCP to Mrinal Gore, Mangala Parikh and Kamal Desai at Dhule, closing her letter with the observation that 'our documents are hot. I end with Benjamin Franklin's sentence: "Those who give up liberty to purchase temporary safety, deserve neither liberty or safety."¹⁷⁹

In a letter to a family member Pramila wrote, 'got your letter. Because of some restrictions I was communicating with you through Vrindavan's letter.'¹⁸⁰ During a stay at BCP, she urged one of her fellow detainees at Yerwada to write but also emphasised that 'we are taking a lot of trouble to write letters. So please don't be angry if they are delayed.'¹⁸¹ Back at Yerwada a few months later, in a letter to Socialist Member of Parliament (MP) and one of Janata's founding members S.M. Joshi, Pramila recorded that 'nowadays atmosphere is very strict so it is doubtful if I can send you a letter so I am writing in a

¹⁷⁸ Vasanthi Raman, Interview with Author.

¹⁷⁹ PD (YCP) to Mangala, Mrinal and Chhabutai (Dhule), 17 October 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁸⁰ PD (YCP) to Vrindavan and Asha, undated, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁸¹ PD (BCP) to UM (YCP), 23 March 1976, LP, Reel 8.

hurry'.¹⁸² In the same month, Mrinal Gore similarly wrote 'there are restrictions on letters now'.¹⁸³ Some of her communications from August 1976 imply that these restrictions remained in force. In one letter she instructed the recipient 'if you are sending me a letter, send it in the name of Bharati',¹⁸⁴ and she advised another to 'send me letters but in the name of Bharati. I will send you in the name of Neeta and also sign as Neeta.'¹⁸⁵ Mrinal's instructions not only indicate the kinds of restrictions that Yerwada's female community faced, but also the tactics that they employed to subvert these. The second letter to Mrinal's friend Pushpa also reveals the permeation of these restrictions across the state's various institutions, as she wrote that 'yesterday the jailer told me I will be taken to Dhule again. So may be shifted within a couple of days. From there I can only send official letters.'¹⁸⁶

Detenues' communications regularly expressed their thoughts on the political situation. Indumati Kelkar wrote to Madhu Limaye from Yerwada 'to congratulate you for giving your resignation from the post of MP' in protest against the Emergency.¹⁸⁷ Shanti Naik wrote similarly that 'handing in your resignation from the post of MP was a really good job you did. After meeting Indu, I thought so. After you even Sharad Yasav resigned. And we can slowly see the results.'¹⁸⁸ Pramila Dandavate frequently commented on the progress of opposition to the Emergency outside of the prison. She wrote to S.M Joshi in June 1976, 'I wanted to ask about the new party. To form a strong opposition party, we need to bring parties both big and small together. To bring them together is not an easy job'. She expressed her agreement with his statement that the attempt at union was 'a tactical line not an ideological one'. However, she also articulated concern that 'now that party is thinking of elections. On one side we are showing that this party is formed only for democratic fight and then on the other side focusing only on election, people will think this party is made

¹⁸² PD (YCP) to S.M. Joshi, 8 June 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁸³ MG (YCP) to Gopal Rao, 29 June 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁸⁴ MG (YCP) Anutai, 20 August 1976.

¹⁸⁵ MG to (YCP) Pushpatai, 21 August 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Indumati Kelkar (YCP) to MD, 27 April 1976, LP, Reel 8.

¹⁸⁸ SN (YCP) to MD, 27 April 1976, LP, Reel 8.

only for election and nothing other than that. All those parties who have already failed in front of people?...They may fail again. Old sins cannot be covered with new clothes...How are we going to bring new hope?' She suggested that 'we should take some more time in announcing our new party' and warned that they should proceed with caution in the absence of a firm agenda.¹⁸⁹ The prison was not an isolated space and women remained well connected to the wider underground, anti-Emergency movement. Women's lived experiences of Yerwada correspond with conceptions of prison spaces that acknowledge that 'the prison wall itself is porous permeable and interpreted' and 'it does not spatially demarcate the limits of the prison in terms of the experiences of incarceration'.¹⁹⁰

These narratives and the presence of women in jails across Maharashtra during this period demonstrate that both within and outside of the prison walls, women were active in anti-Emergency politics and protest. In a letter to a friend Mrinal Gore wrote, 'I think nowadays people get used to this Emergency. We need to make them alive. We need to wake them up. Specially the ladies, we need to prepare them for protest. I know you will be working for this.'¹⁹¹ Writing to Aruna Dhere in January 1976, Durga Bhagwat similarly reflected, 'I heard that you are in prison now, I am really proud of you. You young women will have to fight this battle out. We will just be here and there.'¹⁹² Many women played prominent roles in opposing the Emergency and were detained as political prisoners because of their affiliations or expressions of resistance. This chapter presents evidence about the scale of these detentions in Maharashtra that other sources ignore. It shows that women did fight this battle, which has not previously been acknowledged or considered.

Ujjwal Kumar Singh claims that 'the narratives of women political prisoners highlight the gender bias of the penal system in which women prisoners on the whole were given unequal treatment'.¹⁹³ My analysis shows that such biases did shape some experiences of

¹⁸⁹ PD (YCP) to SM Joshi, 8 June 1976, LP Reel 8.

¹⁹⁰ Moran, *Carceral Geography*, 101.

¹⁹¹ MG (YCP) to Pushpatai, 21 August 1976

¹⁹² DB to AD (YCP), 30 January 1976.

¹⁹³ Singh, *Political Prisoners*, 241.

detention under Emergency, as some women were subject to threats, violence and poor facilities arising directly from the gendered segregation and inadequacies of prison spaces. Critically, I also foreground the diversity of women's experiences of incarceration during this period by highlighting more positive constructions of the jail in their narratives. The chapter challenges the dominant perception of female Emergency prisoners as victims, refuses the projection of an undifferentiated category of political prisoner and acknowledges that ideology, status and background shaped detainees' experiences. However, it also demonstrates the importance of local factors, like state government practices and the specific physical and social characteristics of prisons, in shaping incarceration. The chapter foregrounds the multiplicity of meanings attached to Emergency prisons, which for many women detained at Yerwada and in Maharashtra, operated as sites of politicised resistance, social networks and relative freedom.

Conclusions

Chapter one highlighted that following elections in 1977, the Janata government included the fewest number of women in any *Lok Sabha* since independence. However, a small number of the women discussed in this thesis held prolific positions in post-Emergency political life. Pushpa Bhave took on the role of Janata Party Secretary in Mumbai. Ahilya Rangnekar and Mrinal Gore were elected on a CPI (M) and Janata ticket respectively. Further, many of the women discussed throughout this thesis played prominent roles in autonomous women's groups and gendered activism that proliferated towards the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s. As highlighted in chapter one, the Emergency is often positioned as simply a catalyst for this second phase of the Indian women's movement. This thesis complicates this simplistic division. It situates women's engagements with Emergency politics within a larger historical trajectory and within the contexts of various other factors that shape women's politics and activism, particularly location, class and political affiliation.

In this sense, the thesis speaks to dominant debates in Emergency historiography that position its politics not as a sudden aberration, but as a phenomenon with long-term causes and consequences. Chapter four's analysis of the regime's sterilisation policies is particularly important here. It adds nuance to the basic distinction that 1977 functioned as a turning point where the family planning programme's focus shifted from men to women. It highlights the critical role of women's bodies, status and gendered power relations in shaping the articulation, implementation of negotiation of the Emergency's sterilisation drive. Further, interventions in historiography have widened its remit to foreground the importance of a range of historical actors and processes in shaping the State of Emergency. It cannot simply be explained as a culmination of Gandhi's centralisation of political power and we are beginning to see Emergency histories from a variety of locations and perspectives. This thesis contributes to this broadening scope, both in its inclusion of women and in its extension of a gendered analysis beyond the female figurehead.

Just a few short years after Janata's victory at the polls, Gandhi was back in office as Prime Minister. The Janata government, united only by its anti-Emergency position, represented a 'veritable mishmash of ideologies'.¹ The party was beset by disagreements, infighting and a preoccupation with prosecuting Gandhi for her Emergency sins: 'the men in power had been victimised during the Emergency' but they 'chose to focus on taking revenge against an individual when they should have been running a country'.² Rather than consolidate their public image their relentless attacks on Gandhi, which included arresting her, actually served to bolster hers. As Tariq Ali notes, 'the sight of a whole government pursuing a lone woman did not appeal to Mother India'.³ Gandhi and her party won elections in January 1980 with 351 seats in the *Lok Sabha* and 42.7% of the vote.⁴

Guha asserts that Janata's victimisation of Gandhi and their attempts to arrest her 'allowed her to acquire a halo of martyrdom'.⁵ This halo was cemented when on 31 October 1984, Gandhi was shot in the gardens of her house by two of her bodyguards following the Indian Army's assault on the Golden Temple in Amritsar as part of the government's Operation Blue Star.⁶ Memorialisation of her has consistently been steeped in the kinds of gendered narratives that this thesis demonstrates were central to pro-Emergency propaganda. One collection of tributes published on her death asserted that 'her mother image will remain forever in the minds and hearts of millions of Indians'.⁷ Her son Rajiv Gandhi, who became Prime Minister after her assassination, imbued her *Bharat Mata* image with particular authority in his contribution to this collection as he insisted, 'she was a mother not only to me but to the whole nation'.⁸ The dominance of these kinds of narratives, intertwining her motherhood and martyrdom, have contributed to the marginalisation of the

¹ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 526.

² *Ibid.*, 538.

³ Ali, *The Nehrus and the Gandhis*, 203

⁴ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, 48. See 42-54 for a detailed discussion of the anti-Janata wave, coalitions and regional factors contributing to Gandhi's victory.

⁵ Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 538.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 565-572.

⁷ *Indira Gandhi: Tributes* (New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1984) 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Emergency and its more controversial elements, which do not fit with such gendered narratives. They have also played a role in what Ashis Nandy describes as the 'enormous political effort' that has 'gone into wiping out the Emergency as a live memory'.⁹ Tarlo begins her ethnography by exploring the official presentation of the Emergency, or lack of, at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Museum, housed at her former Delhi residence 1 Safdarjung Road. The Emergency is conspicuously absent from the display depicting Gandhi's political career through newspaper headlines, showing only the headline announcing its imposition and one proclaiming its electoral defeat. Underneath these headlines sits a case containing elements that formed 'an intimate part' of Gandhi's daily life. These private, domestic items temper the more controversial aspects of her public and political leadership, including knitting needles, a Beatrix Potter plate, scrabble board, family photographs and binoculars for bird watching.¹⁰ Since gendered discourses have been crucial in perpetuating official narratives of Emergency, my interrogation of their construction is critical.

My analysis also provides alternative perspectives with which to view the Emergency. It places gendered narratives and women's actions at the centre of its politics and provides new insights into how the regime was articulated, enacted, experienced and resisted. It offers a transformative rather than contributory women's history, one that has significant implications for Emergency historiography and how we understand the implementation of particular measures, the construction of its dominant narratives and the mobilisation of resistance to it. The preceding chapters show the critical position of women and gendered images to the dominant narratives of both the State of Emergency and opposition (chapter two and three). They raise interesting questions in relation to women's agency. Although these narratives are not necessarily prescriptive of women's participation in the regime, women's status sometimes influenced the implementation of particular Emergency policies (chapter four). Further, it is difficult to extract women's voices or locate agency in documentary evidence about these narratives, especially from pro-Emergency

⁹ Qtd. In Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories*, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

propaganda. However, utilising new evidence such as oral histories and personal correspondence and examining the manifestation of Emergency politics in diverse spaces begins to display some of the ways in which women actively engaged with the regime (chapter five and six).

These new perspectives open up several avenues for future research. Describing her experience of anti-Emergency activism, Vibhuti Patel told me that ‘many women were there...intelligent and articulate women were writers and fighters’.¹¹ This connection between writing, both journalistic and fictional, and activism, and women’s roles within this, warrants further exploration. Journalists Kalpana Sharma and Pamela Philipose and fiction writer Meena Alexander were among the women to share their Emergency experiences with me for this project. Their narratives reveal the day-to-day workings of the regime’s censorship and attempts to negotiate and subvert this. Chapter three’s analysis of representations of women’s support for the Emergency and chapter five’s discussion of the regime’s intrusions into the lives of Miranda House staff and students begin to highlight the importance of the university campus as a space in the politics of Emergency. Several of the women interviewed for this project were also JNU students. Their roles in student activism and the ways in which both the regime’s repressive measures and resistance to these played out on campus is another area for future work. This is particularly pertinent given the contemporary importance of universities in the current government’s attempts to delineate ‘anti-national’ activities and repress dissent.¹²

Many of the women discussed throughout this thesis have left wing affiliations. Given recognition of the importance of this period for legitimising the BJP and the plethora of scholarship on women and *Hindutva*,¹³ there is scope for a more detailed consideration

¹¹ Vibhuti Patel, Interview with Author.

¹² There have been several recent examples of this, perhaps the most prolific being the February 2016 arrest of JNU Student’s Union President Kanhaiya Kumar on charges of sedition. See Priyamvada Gopal, ‘This is a watershed moment for India. It must choose freedom over intolerance’ *The Guardian* (17 February 2016) <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/feb/17/india-kanhaiya-kumar-watershed-freedom-intolerance-bjp-hindu> (accessed 29 February 2016).

¹³ See, for instance, Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds.) *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays* (New Delhi: Kali for Women) 1995.

of right wing women's activism in the anti-Emergency movement. We also need more qualitative, ethnographic research like Tarlo's, which renders visible inaccessible Emergency experiences, particularly those of poor, low caste citizens. This thesis's discussion of localised Emergency experiences and evidence from Maharashtra and other states speaks to questions that have recently been raised about binary, simplistic perceptions of a north/south Emergency experience. My work and other recent literature on this highlight the need to re-evaluate this and the perceived relationship between national elections and local, state level politics in this context. This thesis provides a platform for this further work. It also offers a critical space for articulating women's experiences and activism, and underscores the importance of a gendered perspective for understanding the Emergency's political history.

Appendix 1

Women detained under MISA, Yerwada Central Prison¹⁴

Registration No.	Name	Age	Date of Admission	Remarks
1	Hausaben Ratansingh Rajda	40	3.7.75	Released 26.1.77
7	Ahilya Pandurang Rangnekar	51	3.8.75	Released 21.1.77
10	Usha Thombare	24	30.8.75	(Detained Bhir District Prison 4.7.75 then transferred to YCP. Spent 3.11.75-15.11.75 in Aurangabad Central Prison) Released 26.1.77
11	Nirmala Bhaskar Shende	54	31.8.75	Released 26.1.77
13	Shanti Narayan Naik	52	6.4.74	Released 8.4.74 (Naik's association with the CPI (ML) explains her pre Emergency detention. Although not included in the data, letters from her written from Yerwada and dated in 1976 show that authorities re-arrested her during the Emergency).
14	Sudha Vasant Rao Soni	42	22.11.75	Transferred to Nagpur Central Prison 4.3.76. Released 26.1.77
15	Sumathi Balkrishnan Sukaliker	52	22.11.75	Transfer to NCP 28.2.76. Released 26.1.77
16	Shakuntala Ramchandra Dabir	60	26.11.75	Transfer to NCP 31.1.76. Released 25.1.77
17	Usha Vishnu Kavare	52	26.11.75	Transfer to NCP 31.1.76. Released 26.1.77
18	Shobhati Madhav Rao Managi Fadavis	26	30.11.75	Transfer to NCP 31.1.76. Released 25.1.77
19	Suman Pimlapure	35	30.11.75	Transfer to NCP 31.1.76. Released 26.1.77

¹⁴ All data (including any gaps and spellings) taken verbatim from Order No. 15A.2878/2274/SPL.4, Home Department (Special) Bombay to Dr Arun Limaye, 1195/1 Nandadeep, Fergusson College Road, Pune, LP, Reel 8. Any comments or additional information added in brackets.

20	Shantidevi Rangarib	37	1.12.75	Transfer to NCP 31.1.76. Released 26.1.77
21	Sitabai Babu Gurijal	45	1.12.75	Detention order revoked and released 15.4.76
22	Shanta Timma Crase	50	1.12.75	Detention order revoked and released 3.5.76
23	Sushila Shankar Ratole	30	1.12.75	Transfer to Nanded District Prison 15.5.76
24	Sunita Dillip Araliker	28	4.12.75	Released 25.6.76
25	Rajanibai Vasudeo Vishvekar	42	9.12.75	Transfer to NCP 31.1.76. Released 26.1.77
26	Nirmalabai Rajabhau Velekar	45	9.12.75	Transfer to NCP 31.1.76. Released 26.1.77.
27	Pramila Vishnu Tople	45	9.12.75	Transfer to NCP 31.1.76. Released 21.1.77
28	Ahilya Hiralal Kaikadi	36	17.12.75	Transfer to ACP 9.4.76. Released 13.7.76
29	Manjula Hardan Kulkarni	42	17.12.75	Released 21.1.77
30	Kalindibai Mangarao Phatak	42	19.12.75	Transfer to NCP 28.2.76. Released 26.1.77
31	Sarojini Gopalrao Deshpande	49	20.12.75	Transfer to NCP 31.1.76. Released 26.1.77
32	Malatibai Madhukarrao Bhagawat	47	20.12.75	Transfer to NCP 02.02.76. Released 26.1.77
33	Ranabai Yadhavrao Deshpande	46	6.1.76	Transfer to NCP 24.2.76. Released 26.1.77
34	Ramvaitabai R. Gaikwad	42	11.1.76	Transfer to Aurangabad Central Prison 9.4.76 (not listed in ACP records)
35	Madhuri Madhukar Kutube	36	23.1.76	Transfer to NCP 24.2.76. Released 1.2.77
36	Pushpalata Keshavrao Kalvit	48	23.1.76	Transfer to NCP 24.2.76. Released 1.2.77
37	Kali Chintya Paradhi	35	24.1.76	Transfer to ACP 13.4.76. Released 21.2.77

38	Mithi Dagdu Paradhi	25	24.1.76	Transfer to ACP 17.4.76. Released 21.2.77
39	Shevantabai Bhagaji	79	24.1.76	
40	Malan Sundar Paradhi	35	21.4.76	Transfer ACP 17.4.76 21.2.77
41	Gitabai Govind Purnapatri	38	30.1.76	Released 31.1.77
42	Indumati Shripad Kelkar	52	9.2.76	(Previously admitted to YCP under DIR 30.12.75 convicted and released 8.1.76.) Detained under MISA until released 26.1.77
43	Hirabai Hari Pawar	35	18.3.76	Transfer to ACP 17.4.76. Released 13.7.76
44	Rukmani Bhagoji Pardhi		22.3.76	Detention order revoked and released 3.4.76
45	Mrinal Keshav Gore	45	4.4.75	(First admitted to BCP 22.12.75 and transferred to Akola District Prison 26.12.75. Transferred back to BCP 18.1.76 and then to YCP). Transfer to Dhule District Prison 21.9.76. Released 26.1.77.
46	Sunder Vinayak Navalkar	50	14.4.76	(First admitted to BCP 9.3.76 and released 3.4.76. Arrested and admitted to BCP 4.4.76 then transferred to YCP.) Released 21.3.77
47	Sitabai balu Dhotre	35	27.5.76	Released 22.2.77
48	Urvashi Janshed Patel	25	31.10.76	Released 22.2.77
49	Laxmibai Pukaran Alkunde	35	6.10.76	Released 22.2.77
50	Satyawa Subhu Alkunde	50	6.10.76	Released 22.2.77
51	Christian Matthews Fernandes	40	13.11.76	Released 22.2.77
52	Durgabai Narayan Bhagwat	65	25.11.76	En route for II case from BCP. First admitted to

				BCP 9.9.76. Released 25.1.77
53	Vasanthi Deo Nathan	31	19.1.77	Transferred to Kalyan District Prison 8.3.77
54	Jean Vinay Kalgutkar	43	11.3.77	Released 21.3.77
	Chhaya Suratvanti	27	7.7.75	Detention order revoked and released 18.7.75
	Malanabai Vasant Tulpule	52	11.5.74	Released on bail 29.5.74 (Her inclusion in this list suggests that, like Shanti Naik, she was re-arrested during Emergency.)
	Fanabai Sonavane	40	7.7.75	Detention order revoked and released 17.7.75
	Jayawantiben Navichandra Mehta	36	3.8.75	(First admitted to BCP 27.6.75. Later transferred to BCP for one night 4.4.76 then back to YCP.) Transferred to BCP 4.10.76. Released 18.1.77
	Pramila Dandavate	47	3.8.75	(Transferred to BCP for an unspecified amount of time 17.1.76. Transferred from YCP to BCP 23.3.76 and back to YCP 28.3.76.) Released 21.1.77
	Mangala Parikh	50	24.10.75	(First admitted to BCP 17.7.75. Transferred from YCP to BCP 23.3.76 and back to YCP 28.3.76.) Transferred to Dhule District Prison 23.9.76. Released 26.1.77
	Kamal Desai	55	24.10.75	(Transferred from YCP to BCP 4.4.76 for one night.) Transferred to Dhule District Prison 23.9.76. Released 26.1.77

Appendix 2

Letter confirming ethical approval



RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE SERVICES

Ref: ERP1207

29th August 2014

Gemma Scott
139 Fearn Avenue
Newcastle
ST5 8LP

Dear Gemma,

Re: Gender, power and the internal Emergency in India

Thank you for submitting your revised application for review. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel. The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Summary Document	2	25/08/14
Letter of Invitation	2	25/08/14
Information Sheet	2	25/08/14
Consent Form	2	25/08/14
Consent Form for use of quotes	2	25/08/14
Interview Topic Guide	2	25/08/14

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application, you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via the ERP administrator stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via <http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on uso.erps@keele.ac.uk Stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

Yours sincerely

PP

Dr Jackie Waterfield
Chair – Ethical Review Panel

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